Buddhadasa's Movement: An Analysis of Its Origins, Development, and Social Inpact

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Notes and Translation

Words associated with Buddhism in this study are used in Pali form, the terms of which are used to refer to the Theravada tradition. The equivalent Snaskrit terms, which are used in Mahayana Buddhism will also be listed.

Pali	**Sanskrit**
dhamma	dharma
kamma	karma
sutta	sutra
tipitaka	tripitaka

Periodization

Sukhothai	13^{th} — 15^{th} centuries
Ayudhaya	1350 — 1767
Thonburi	1767 — 1782
Bangkok	1782 —

Bangkok Period

The First Reign	Rama I	Yotfa	1782 - 1809
The Second Reign	Rama II	Loetla	1809 - 1824
The Third Reign	Rama III	Nangklao	1824 - 1851
The Fourth Reign	Rama IV	Mongkut	1851 - 1868
The Fifth Reign	Rama V	Chulalongkorn	1868 - 1910
The Sixth Reign	Rama VI	Vajiravudh	1910 - 1925
The Seventh Reign	Rama VII	Prachathipok	1925 - 1935
The Eigth Reign	Rama VIII	Ananda	1935 - 1946
The Nineth Reign	Rama IX	Phumiphon	1946 -

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The cultural and social structure of society is formed by a complexity of factors. One of the fundamental factors is religion.[1] From a sociological point of view religion can be seen as the source of dynamic social change. Max Weber, in his famous study, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, demonstrated the influence of religious development on the transformation of society.[2]

Thai society has been historically shaped by Theravada Buddhism. Since the beginning of the thirteen century, Theravada Buddhism has played an important role as a state religion in this country. The influence of Buddhism on Thai society has, undoubtedly, a long history. Buddhism is recognized today as a key factor of social cohesion. The majority of Thais are Buddhists. It is known up to this day that to be Thai means also to be Buddhist. From the Thai standpoint, says Somboon Suksamran "Buddhism has long served as one of the most important source of political legitimation ...socializing, acculturating, and unifying forces in Thai society. It has profoundly influenced the cultural, economic and political development of the nation...." [3]

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Southeast Asian countries were faced with the challenge of the Western colonialism. Thailand presents a unique case in Southeast Asia because it has been able to maintain its independence. Only Thai Buddhism reached the present without severance from its tradition. Nevertheless, Thai religious tradition has undergone varying degrees of social, cultural, and political change, especially in the last century. A series of monastic reform was instigated by a monk of royal parentage who later left the monkhood to become King Rama IV, known as King Mongkut. The reorganization of the Sangha (the order of monks), involving a new system of monastic education throughout the country, was continued and institutionalized by the Supreme Patriarch

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1 Evers, Hans-Dieter, *Monks, Priests, and Peasants*. (The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1972), Cover.

2 See Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. trans. by Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958a.

3 Suksamran, Somboon, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), p. 6.

Wachirayan, a son of Mongkut and a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). These reforms had a tremendous affect on Thai Buddhism, and helped the Theravada tradition in Thailand to harmonize with the process of modernization that was taking place in Thai society.

At present Thai Buddhism continues to make adjustments, especially, toward a more dynamic and purposive role in a developing modern world. These adjustments are evident on the level of the educated elite both in and out of the Sangha, and among the upper strata of the urban Thai middle class, particularly, in Bangkok.[4] It is widely held that the central figure of the dramatic change in Thai religious focus is Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who initiated a religious movement that has developed within Theravada Buddhism from the 1930s.

The dominant feature of the Buddhadasa movement lies in the interpretation of the Pali Canon[5] by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Buddhadasa sees his work as an attempt to purify Buddhism by interpreting and criticizing the Theravada doctrine. Buddhadasa's movement is unique because as a religious movement it focuses primarily on the questions of doctrine and belief.[6]

Buddhadasa interprets Pali Canon intellectually, in a wider and more universal perspective; rejects many aspects of traditional Thai Buddhist thought and practice; and clearly distinguishes Buddhism from what he considers as superstitions and Hindu elements. Moreover, there is a strong constructive component which aims at a revitalization of the tradition by confronting the normative structure of Theravada Buddhism, and making its

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4 In this context the term "middle class" is used in a broad sense, including officials who play important roles in many sections of Thai society. Many are Western educated and live in a Westernized style.

5 The Pali Canon, known as Tipitaka (three baskets), consists of Vinaya Pitika (the monastic discipline which includes the core Patimokkha rules of discipline); Sutta Pitaka (the sermons and discourses of the Buddha); and Abhidhamma Pitaka (consists mostly of a complex arrangement and commentary on the discourses) see Tambiah, S.J., *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p 33.

6 Swearer, Donald K., "Reformist Buddhism in Thailand." in *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh* Vol.I., ed. by Suan Usom Foundation (Bangkok: Suan Usom Foundation, 1982) p. 502.

teachings relevant to the contemporary world. It follows closely the shift of ideas and values of his audience by stressing on the positive autonomous action in the world. Religious action is identified with the whole of life. The internal quality of the person is emphazied. Buddhadasa declares that salvation is potentially available to any person. The achievement of the ultimate state of existence is not to be found in any kind of withdrawal from the world but in the midst of worldly activities. His interpretation is widely accepted and has spread throughout the country.

Buddhadasa's interpretations are enthusiastically supported by a section of the urban middle class which creates a strong base for the movement which may itself be seen as a religious revival. They contribute to religious discourse through the stimulation of interest in the new interpretation of Buddhism. Religious values are emphasized. Thus characteristic of the new situation in Thai society is that religion is no longer the monopoly of groups explicitly labeled "religious".

To a considerable degree, Buddhadasa's movement does not only manifest change in Thai culture and society but also suggests a stage of religious development which facilitate change.

Studying Buddhadasa's Movement

Buddhadasa's movement (Phutthatat line in Thai language), which began in the early 1930s, is widely held to be the most influential development within Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. In keeping with this view, scholars of contemporary Buddhism have devoted considerable attention to it. Their attention has been focused on two main aspects of Buddhadasa's work: his interpretation of Buddhism and of the social development, econonic and political implications of Buddhist teachings.

Majority of the studies on Buddhadasa are devoted to his interpretation of Buddhist doctrine.[7] The significance of Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism is seen to be two-

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7 Swearer, D.K., trans. & ed. *Toward the Truth*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971.

fold; on the one hand, making Buddhist doctrine relevant to the life of the layman in this world, on the other, returning to the pristine values and truths of Buddhism.[8]

Buddhadasa's interpretation is considered as an attempt to provide Buddhist teachings with a universal perspective by interpreting the central tenets of Buddhism as a way of life for contemporary man. To this end, all "metaphysical" interpretations of the doctrine, including the notion of the supernatural, as well as the post-canonical commentaries are rejected. On this point Tambiah noted that:[9]

> "Buddhadasa's interpretations are compelling because they stem from one basic thrust, which is that for the Buddhist quest it is the world here and now that is relevant. This basic point has many ramifications andresonances: it calls for action here and now as being productive...the importance is Buddhadasa's adumbration of what he considers the central tenets of Buddhism as a way of life..."

The above studies point out that Buddhadasa's interpretation reveals a "rational" perspective of Buddhism and some striking analogies with the Protestant Reformation in Western Europe in the seventeenth century.[10] Importantly, although these authors accept Buddhadasa's interpretation as one of the most enlightened and penetrating that has ever been produced in Thailand, they tend to believe that it has impact only among the intellectuals and a part of the educated middle class. The radically rationalistic teaching allows these intellectuals to rediscover the meanings of Buddhism and to search for appropriate means to

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Jackson, P.A., *Buddhadasa: A Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World*. Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1988.

Gabaude, L., Introduction a l'herméneutique de Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. unpublished Ph.D thesis, La Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III, 1979.

Sirikanchana, Pattaraporn, *The Concept of dhamma in Thai Buddhism: A Study in the Thought of Vajiranana and Buddhadasa*. unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1985.

Phongphit, Seri, *The Problem of Religious Language: A Study of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Ian Ramsey as Model for Mutual Understanding of Buddhism and Christianity*. Munich, 1978.

Jacobs, M.C. Jr., *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa: A Thai Buddhist and the Psycho-Social Dialectic of Cultural Evolution and Transformation Through Religious Reformation*. unplublished M.A. thesis, The American University Washington, DC, 1974.

8 Tambiah, S.J., *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 411.

9 Tambiah: 1976, pp. 411-412

10 Mulder, Niels, *Everyday Life in Thailand* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1978), p. 152.

apply it in their daily lives and activities.

The other main thrust of the studies has been to generally acknowledge that Buddhadasa's interpretation of social development, education, economics, and politics as representative of, and based on central Buddhist teachings. Comparisons are central to Buddhadasa's interpretations. For instance, the comparison between Dhammic Socialism of Buddhadasa and Buddhist Socialism in Burma or Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka.[11] Many public and university seminars are held to discuss these concepts, and their application to Thai society. Buddhadasa's interpretations of economics and politics are very controversial, partly because they are seen as an attempt to offer a Buddhist utopia or a perfect society in this world.

The consideration of Buddhadasa's teaching as a catalysing "religious movement" -its origin and development, activities and its impact on society- has been neglected. Here I use the term "religious movement" to cover groups which, based on theological considerations, promote a particular religious or philosophical world view.[12]

In my opinion, studies which concentrate merely on the innovative ideas of Buddhadasa are inadequate in understanding the process of religious change and its relationship to change in other social spheres within the modern Thai context. Moreover, the formation of new religious ideas and practices should not be considered as an isolated event.

Max Weber's analysis of religions, especially Protestantism, demonstrated the influence of religious ideas, in particular "Wirtschaftsethik" on the rise of modern society. He also made clear that among the most important carriers of such religious ideas are various religious movements. Although most of Weber's works dealt explicitly with the relation of the Protestant Ethic to the economic sphere his work on religion in Asia contains extremely

11 See Swearer. D.K, ed. *Dhammic Socialism* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1986). Preecha Piampongsarn, *Serttasaat Chao Put* [Dhammic Economics: Socio-Economic Philosophy of the Buddhists], (Bangkok: Social Research Institute, 1988). Seri Phongphit, *Thamma kab Karnmuang: Buddhadasa kab Sangkhom Thai* [Dhamma and Politics: Buddhadasa and Thai Society], Thammasat Journal, March 1981.

12 Barker, Eillen, *New Religious Movements* (London: HMSO Publications, 1989), p. 145.

important analyses of the influence of the political ethic of the great religions on the institutional settings of societies.[13]

Bellah has also pointed out that religion is very bound up with social processes, especially in Asia, where religion still largely shapes the traditional forms of culture, and is deeply involved in social and personal life.[14] It often has profound implications for encouraging or inhibiting economic, political and social developments.[15]

Some contemporary research argues that not all religious movements necessarily have direct impact on broader institutional organizations or promote fundamental changes in social and cultural structures. Nevertheless, when such "intellectual" interpretations are generated at the traditional and indigenous rather than the imported level they must be taken seriously. The expansion of Buddhadasa's movement among the intellectuals should not be simply identified as primarily reflected in the religious sphere. Buddhism occupies a central place in the Thai social system in which 95 percent of the population are Buddhists. Therefore religious change cannot be isolated, but interacts with other social institutions to create change in Thai society. The formation and the development of Buddhadasa's movement allow us to raise many interesting questions. Through a study of Buddhadasa's movement we can gain insights into religious innovation and the process of social change in contemporary Thailand.

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13 Eisenstadt S.N. ed., *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization*. (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

14 Bellah, R.N., *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), Introduction.

15 Spencer, Robert F., "Introduction: Religion in Asian Society," in *Religion and Change in Contemporary Asia*. Spencer, Robert F. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 11.

Studies in the Sociology of Religious Movements

The study of religious movements has grown out of and remains inextricably related to the much broader effort to understand the machanism or process by which religious movements first appear. There is a general interest in the appearance of religious innovation because it is thought to represent an instance of cultural adjustment that may have significant ramifications for societal values. The production of variations in religious forms serves as a starting point for examining the interconnections between specific types of religious symbolism and social environment.

Social science studies of religious movements are generally formulated at two levels: the structural and the individual. The first attempts to answer the question: Why do religious movements occur? The second tries to answer the question: Why do people join them?[16]

Among the various attempts to deal with this issue is the way sociologists open up important discussion on the dimensions of religious movements, particularly their systematic studies closely related to the formation of the religious movements in modern societies. Studies which focus on the formation of the religious movement are mostly based on an application of theories concerning the relationship between social change and religious functions. Thus the emergence of a religious movement is often interpreted as a response to social disruption and personal anxiety in times of rapid social change. In other words, religious movements arise because traditional religion and society are disrupted by radical social change; which creates an anomie or normlessness. Two systematic studies will now be selected as representative of this treatment. J. Milton Yinger's <u>The Scientific Study of Religion</u> [17], and Robert Wuthnow's <u>The Religious Movements and Counter Movements in North America</u> [18].

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16 Wilson, John, *Religion in American Society* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), p. 94.

17 Yinger J. Milton, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Co., 1970), p. 170.

18 Wuthnow R., "The Religious Movements and Counter Movements in North America", in *New Religious Movements and Rapid Social Change*, ed. by Beckford, James A. (London: Sage

Yinger treats religious movements (in Japan) only briefly. He sees religious movements as responses to endemic social change. According to him, the significant cultural influences are closely related to individual motivation that predisposes many people to join religious movements. The effect of the simultaneous influence of urban migration, war, defeat, and occupation have been a great increase in anxiety and anomie because a sense of shared cultural values is difficult to maintain in such circumstances. Thus religious movements arise as antidotes to anomie.[19]

Wuthnow has explored religious movements in Canada and the United States where a number of religious groups have mushroomed since World War II. Wuthnow suggests that the rise of religious movements is closely associated with periods of rapid social and economical change, and times of religious and cultural unrest.[20] The formation of new religious groups may be understood as a response to a situation of strain within the system.

The above studies have considerable value for my present task, particularly the significant dimension of social change, which generates new religious ideas and practices. Interestingly, academic studies of religion are apparently in agreement on the fact that religious traditions are by no means static. Simultaneously, they accept that the rise of religious movements is not constant. Movements appear in some periods and not others. This is why it is important to investigate the connection between the emergence of innovative movements in religion and social conditions. When there arise crises that cannot be overcome by the dominant religions, the opportunity for new ideas is opened.

Although, the crisis-response theory has its strengths, its weak points are also apparent. The formation of religious movements, like all religious phenomena, is complex. Religious movements are not simple responses to socio- cultural crises. They should not be treated as automated products of external factors or as elements in an overreaching sequence

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Publications Ltd., 1986), pp. 25-38.

19 Yinger: 1970, p. 170.

20 Wuthnow: 1985, pp. 27-28.

of historical events moving in a set direction. A problematic aspect of the crisis-response interpretation is that the importance of social conditions is mentioned as the single causative factor in the rise of religious movements. Do the influence of religious factors and the innovative ideas of the founders not play any role in the formation of a religious movement? It seems to me that this interpretation not only overlooks the role of religion as a source of social change but also denies that innovation is possible in history. The precise relevance of social conditions is less clear both in its estimation of the difference between the emergence of religious and of non-religious ideas and activities.

I agree with H. Bryon Earhart, who investigated religious movements in Japan. He concludes that religious movements are not merely responses to crisis; they are attempts at religious renewal through the interpretation of doctrine, which help people define their own lives and their world.[21] The crisis-response interpretation is strong in accounting for the function of religion, but weak in accounting for religious significance. Therefore while, I do not deny that the crisis-response interpretation is relevant in the explaination of religious movements, I do argue that it is inadequate for comprehending the basic problem of the emergence of new religious groups.

So far I have discussed the limitations of the major approach of studies on religious movements. I now come to the problem of gaining a better perspective by drawing attention to two systematic theoretical statements on religious movements.

First is an attempt to give a new explanation about the formation of religious movements through a phenomenological approach. H. Bryon Earhart attempts to examine the emergence of what he calls "new religion" in Japan. The term "new religion" or "new religious movement" needs some clarification for it is problematic. He argues that new religious movements:[22]

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21 Earhart H.B., "The Interpretation of the 'New Religions' of Japan as New Religious Movement in *Religious Ferment in Asia*. Miller R.J. ed. (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1974), p. 184.

22 Earhart: 1974, p 170-2.

> presuppose a prior tradition (establish religion)... they involve a radical break thereform (not just an inner critique or reform)... the thrust of this break is towards renewal or revitalization. Finally, this results in a significantly new socio-religious organization.

Earhart tends to disagree with the approach that views religious movements as responses to social change:[23]

> various kinds of social change are directly related to the formation of religious movements... there were many religious movements, and the circumstance of their formation were too complex to be easily reduced to one grand theory....

But at the same time he did not deny the importance of social conditions. He suggests three interrelated factors which combine to produce an atmosphere in which religious movements can be born and nourished at least in the Japanese case:[24]

(1) The fossilization of the early tradition; the major "established" religions (Buddhism and Shinto) have become fossilized. The time was ripe for some forms of renewal outside of the existing organized religions.

(2) Severe socio-economic hardship helped provoke the social crisis that raised the question of where people placed their real trust. This social unrest was a precipitating factor, in the sense of directing the timing of the new religious movements and, to a certain extent, in the sense of channeling the shape of the movements.

(3) The personal innovation or creative inspiration of the leaders; it may be charismatic leaders or semi-divine leaders either rediscovering a vital religious element from the previous tradition or having received what they felt to be a new revelation.

According to his interpretation, it takes all three factors to account for the rise of religious movements. A religious movement could not arise if there were only a person with innovative ideas; the weakening of the traditional religion by itself, or even in combination

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23 Earhart, H.B., "Toward a Theory of the Formation of the Japanese New Religions: A Case Study of Gedatsu-kai" in *History of Religions* 20/1-2, Aug-Nov 1980, p. 176.

24 Earhart: 1974, pp. 170-171.

with social factors. I argued that these factors interact to create a number of rather distinct new religious movements.

Although his works concentrate on "new religious movements" in Japan, he is still writing about Buddhist movements. Although the socio-economic situations in contemporary Japan and Thailand are quite different, they share some historical similarities. Socio-economic and political conditions from the end of the nineteeth century to the beginning of the twentieth century saw the genesis of many new religious movements in both countries. Some specific similarities are: the unbroken, continuous development of Buddhist tradition, the continuity of the monarchy; the lack of colonial experience; and indifference to reactions from the outside world.

Thus we may employ Earhart's theoretical concept to the formation aspect of religious movements. However, it is also neccessary to understand how religious movements spread and persist after the conditions which gave birth to them have changed. When this happens it is possible for the religious movements to be studied on their own. However Earhart's approach is well suited to exploring the formation of religious movements in Thailand.

A second interesting attempt to conceptualize new religious movements is Bellah's analysis of the relationship between progess, religion, and modernization. Bellah dicusses the terms "progress":[25]

> progress is an increase in the capacity of a social system to receive and process information from within and without the system and to respond appropriately to it. Progress, thus involves not merely learning but also learning capacity, an increasing ability to "learn to learn". This kind of learning capacity includes the "capacity for deep rearrangements of inner structure, and thus for the development of radically new functions...

From Bellah's standpoint progress requires some balance between structural

25 Bellah Robert N., "Epilogue in Religions and Progress in Modern Asia," in *Religion and Progess in Modern Asia*, Bellah, R.N. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 170.

continuity and structural change, so that the society will become neither rigid nor disorganized. The success or failure of a given society will depend very much on the nature of its inner structure, its deepest values and commitments. The degree to which the inner structures and values can provide identity, continuity, and coherence while actually encouraging profound structural changes is the degree to which they are conducive to progress.[26]

"Religion" according to Bellah is a set of normative symbols institutionalized in a society or internalized in the individual personality. The central function of a religion is to act as a "cultural gyroscope", to provide a stable set of definitions of the world and, correlatively, of the individual, so that both the transience, the crises of life can be faced with some equanimity by the society and person in question. It is this stability, continuity, and coherence provided by commitment to a set of religious symbols that give religion such a prominent place in defining the identity of a group or person.[27]

Bellah sees the identity function of religion as a cybernetic control machanism in a society or personality. The religious symbols project what he calls a "set of limit images", which indicate what sorts of action are possible and desirable. These limited images operate to bring social and personal actions within the framework of a "higher power" or "wider meaning", so that some sort of action is encouraged and others avoided. Religion helps to place human action within certain boundaries.[28]

From the above analytical definitions, we come to the question of how religion relates to the progess or the increase in learning capacity. Bellah pointed out that a religion with its general definitions of the world, society, and individual, especially its consequent set of limited images will have very considerable implications for the learning capacity of the society in which it is institutionalized or of the individual who has internalized it. Any particular religion is apt to contain all these implications in varying degrees and to shift its emphasis over

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26 Ibid., p. 171.

27 Ibid., pp. 171-3.

28 Ibid., pp. 173-4.

time.[29]

According to Bellah, while religion provides for stability, continuity, and coherence in society on the one hand; on the other, it inevitably changes in accordance with the whole process of socio-cultural transformation or the very degree to which societies were differentiated, religious symbol systems can evolve and become more rationalized. For Bellah the central dimension of religious evolution is what he calls the "rationalization of religious symbolism." [30] Important social and personal changes accompany this process. That is, on the whole, the more rationalized religious symbol system the more favorable the implications for progress.

The term "modernization" in Bellah's view is based primarily on his definition of progress. In defining modernization he argued that some discussions of modernity defined it too narrowly in terms of technology. Although technological development demonstrates the nature of endless innovation, it is not technology that grounds modern culture. Rather, it is modern culture that gives scope to technology.

The modernization of societies and personalities is not concerned solely with maximization of technical efficiency. For Bellah[31]

> Modernization involves the increased capacity for rational goal-setting because it gives the system -society, organization, personality- a more comprehensive communications network through which it is possible to assess the needs and potentialities of all parts of the system.

Thus Bellah considers modernity can not be merely an external problem for religion. It is not something to which religion can merely adjust or not. Modernity involves a changed sense of identity and a new way of posing limited images. It is an internal problem for religion, in that it involves the heart of religious concerns. He also mentions that modernity in the West arose not only in the sphere of science and technology but also in the core of the

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29 Ibid., p. 178.

30 Ibid., pp. 176-7.

religious tradition itself, namely the Protestant Reformation.

In the analysis of religion and modernization in Asia , Bellah explored the problem of tradition and change in terms of "Western impact". He saw the course of the nineteenth century as a difficult period for the whole of Asia, the collision between external pressures and indigenous traditions has very likely resulted in more or less structural change. Bellah viewed "Western impact" in the sense of the more superior social effectiveness of modern organization as having pressured premodern organizations and societies in Asia to question. Consequently, all previous forms of military, economic, political, ideological organization were criticized. Traditional values could no longer be taken for granted. Each society found its own identity becoming problematic. It was, of course, the intellectuals who felt earliest and more severely the cultural trauma of modern pressure. They were forced into a re-examination of their own cultural identity symbols, that is religious symbols.

In a consideration of the cultural response to modernization that occurred in Asian societies, Bellah suggested the four main cultural responses: conversion to Christianity, traditionalism, reformism, and neo-traditionalism.[32]

(1) Christianity. Christianity through missionary and local converts, has had an influence on cultural modernization in Asia. A few traditional intellectuals were won over to Christianity. The proportion of the Christian converts is not large in number and there is great variability from country to country. However, Christian institutions, especially schools and colleges, transmitted modern ideas and expectations to the newly emerging educated elites and continued to circulate in the intellectual marketplace. Certainly, it has been an important catalyst for changes in Asian societies.

It is also clear that some forms of Christianity are in tension with many modern ideas and attitudes. As Western education spread, it became common for Asian intellectuals to use Western secular thought to attack Christianity.

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31 Ibid., p. 195.

32 Ibid., pp. 203-215.

(2) Traditionalism. While modern conditions have actually strengthened traditional religion in many areas, traditional ideas have been declining among elite groups. Paradoxically, it is often among non-elite groups that religious ideas and attitudes characteristic of the traditional cultural elite have been spreading. Although this position tended to challenge or reject totally the whole of Western culture, a strong and growing traditionalism must be a definite barrier to modernization. However, to speak of "pure" traditionalism in the modern world can only be misleading, no group existing in the modern world can wholly ignore modernity or fail to be affected by it. The traditionalists overlap imperceptibly with the neotraditionalist -the former often do unconciously what the latter do conciously, that is, utilize modern ideas and organizational forms for the sake of traditional value commitments.

(3) Reformism. Bellah defines religious reformism as a movement that reinterprets a particular religious tradition to show not only that it is compatible with modernization but also that the tradition vigorously demands at least important aspects of modernity.

This form of response is one of the most fruitful because it provides the potential impetus to modernization, while also providing a continuity with traditional identity symbols, thus furthering change with a minimum of traumatic disturbance. However, the position of reformism is unstable in that, it not only requires a quite sophisticated understanding of both modernity and tradition but also must reconcile some very deep tension between them. This problem is acute for reformism in Asia, where modernity has come largely from outside.

(4) Neotraditionalism. Neotraditionalism, according to Bellah, is a natural and early response to modernizing pressures in most Asian nations. One could maintain the traditional orientation as basic but utilize modern ideas and methods to defend traditional cultural values.

Neotraditionalism where it can generate intense energy and where that energy can be effectively channeled, may be a tempting alternative for modernity. But in some cases, the result has more often been stagnation than one-sided modernization because the elite has

utilized neotraditional symbols, though itself has remained more oriented to secular ideologies, simply to mobilize support to remain in power.

Of the four responses Bellah sees the role of religion in the modernization process in Asia, the category of reformism appears to provide the most appropriate perspective from which to approach the study of Buddhist reform movements in Thailand. Bellah characterizes reformism by the following traits: a return to earlier teachers and texts, a rejection of the intervening tradition, and an interpretation of the pristine teaching as advocating social reform and national regeneration.[33] It is basically a reinterpretation of the religious symbol system in the light of a variety of changes on both the social and personal levels. Looked at from the perspective of the concept of rationalization, reformism might be said to be the attempt to transform the particular cultural and institutional moorings which had characterized the tradition in order for its essential truth to be reinterpreted in the light of a new existential situation. We will attempt to examine Buddhadasa's movement through the use of Bellah's "reformist" category.

Data Collection, Organization, and Aims of the Study

Information gathered for this study is based on both documentary and empirical materials. A documentary research is necessary for collecting historical information. Secondary data, such as documents produced by Buddhadasa and his followers in the form of books, journals, pamphletes, articles, and newspaper reports were also utilized.

The field research covered four provinces in four regions of Thailand: Surat Thani, Bangkok, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Chang Mai. Surat Thani in the South Region is where Suan Mokkh (Buddhadasa's temple) is located. Suan Mokkh, where Buddhadasa lives, is considered the center of the movement. Bangkok in the Central Region is where the main propagation centre is located. It is a highly strategic area for the dissimination of Buddhadasa's teachings and the expansion of the movement. Nakhonratchasima in the Northeast Region and Chiang Mai in the North Region were selected as areas of field research because here, more active member groups hold their activities and implement

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33 Bellah: 1965, pp. 210-211.

development programs in the villages.

The qualitative data were collected through four main methods: interview, survey questionaire, participant observation and case study. Though the majority of those interviewed are members of the movement, some observers and non-members were also interviewed.

This study is organized in eight chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the scope and purpose of the study, theoretical concepts, and methodology. Chapter 2, first, deals with a description and analysis of the historical background of the relationship between socio-political change and Thai Buddhism in the contemporary period. The second part of the chapter focuses on the rise of religious movements and their specific characteristics.

Chapter 3 explores the life history of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: his early life, social and educational experiences, and his life as a Buddhist monk. Through an analysis of his life experiences one can speculate on how he was able to formulate and develop his unique interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, and how his religious thought develops beyond the fabric of traditional Thai Buddhist teachings and practices. Chapter 4 focuses on the concept of Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism, the problems of the interpretation and his criticism of traditional Thai Buddhism. This chapter aims to answer the question why Buddhadasa considers it necessary to reinterpret Buddhist doctrine.

Chapter 5 is devoted to an analysis of the formation and development of Buddhadasa's movement, its ideology, structure, and activities. The movement's main characteristics, as well as the factors related to the expansion of the movement, will be investigated. This chapter attempts to understand what the movement's members seek to achieve. Chapters 6 and 7 are based on empirical research gathered during the fieldwork phase of data collection. The focus will be on the impact of Buddhadasa's movement at the community and individual levels. Thus Chapter 6 will describe what types of individuals are attracted to become members of the movement. Factors such as social backgrounds, educational levels, and occupations will be analysed. Which of Buddhadasa's teachings

particularly attracts them? How are their present religious views altered by contact with Buddhadasa's ideas? Finally in Chapter 7, the movement's developmental impact will be described by presenting the case study of Wang Nam Yaad village, Chomthong District, Chiang Mai. The villagers are exposed to the ideas of Buddhadasa through the resident forest monk who is his follower. We will analyse in what manner the monk adapts Buddhadasa's interpretation to the everyday life of Thai villagers. The last chapter (Chapter 8) presents the general conclusions of the study.

The study aims to examine two issues: first the formation, development, and social impact of Buddhadasa's movement; and second the implications of modernization in Thai society. These two issues will be treated as closely interrelated. The main questions are the following:

(1) Why and under what conditions did Buddhadasa's movement come about?
(2) What type of movement is it?
(3) How did the movement develop and what were the factors which promoted and inhibited its development?
(4) What is its function for the members, and why does it appear to be most meaningful for the intellectuals?
(5) What is the social impact of the movement?

The particular hypothesis of this study is that Buddhadasa`s movement has had and will continue to have a significant social impact on Thai society.

Chapter 2

Social Change and Religious Movements in Thailand

The nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries were marked by colonial expansion in Southeast Asia. Thailand is unique in Southeast Asia in that it was able to maintain independence. However, the impact of colonialism led ultimately to the institutional reform of Thai society, dividing the era of traditional from the modern nation state.[1] The twentieth century, as Suwanna stated, is the turning point in the history of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand.[2] However, the mid-nineteenth century marks the initial stages by which one can trace the continuity of religious development. During this period, a religious reform movement, known as Thammayutnikai, emerged within the Thai Sangha parallel with socio-political modernization and the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in Thailand. This movement played a prominent role in the development of Thai Buddhism throughout the mid-nineteenth and the early part of the twentiety centuries.[3]

This chapter therefore seeks to provide the historical context through which an examination of the relationship between socio-political change and the formation of religious movements in contemporary Thailand becomes possible. This in turn will enable an exploration of relevant aspects in the continuity and discontinuity of Thai religion.

In order to understand the relationship between socio-political change and the developmemt of Thai Buddhism, it will be necessary to briefly consider the essential features of the reform movement (Thammayutnikai) which was established by a monk of royal parentage who spent twenty-seven years (1824- 1851) in robes and later left the monkhood to become King Rama IV popularly known as King Mongkut. The movement took "root" at the very top of the Thai Sangha, in a hierachical society in which the "absolute" monarchy was supported by a secure traditional hierachical polity.

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1 See Wyatt, David K., *The Politics of Reform in Thailand* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969). Girling, John L.S., *Thailand: Society and Politics* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1981).

2 Satha-Anand, Suwanna, "Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand," *Asia Survey* 30/4, 1990, p. 396.

3 See Reynolds, Craig Jame, *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand* (unpublished Ph.D., thesis, Cornell University, 1972). Tambiah: 1973.

Mongkut and His Religious Reforms in the Nineteenth Century

Mongkut (1804-1868) was the eldest son of Rama II by a royal wife and was therefore considered by most as the logical heir of the king. He was ordained as a Buddhist monk at Wat Mahathat, a royal temple, in 1824. Shortly after his ordination Rama II died and one of his elder, half-brothers (a son of Rama II by a non-royal wife) was chosen to be crowned as Rama III. Mongkut decided to remain in robes but took up residence at Wat Samorai (now Wat Rachathivat), a forest monastery near the capital (Bangkok) which specialized in meditation rather than Pali studies. Apparently he was dissatisfied with the spiritual training because his teachers could not provide him reasons for the meditational practices they taught. He found that meditation and ascetic practices which are uninformed by learning were of little value. Thus, he returned to Wat Mahathat to take up Pali studies. He later became one of the leading Thai Pali scholars.

The study of the Pali Canon led Mongkut to see serious discrepancies between Buddhist scriptures and the actual practices of Thai monks. He saw that the Sangha of that time did not strictly follow the monastic discipline in the Vinaya Pitaka, but rather followed traditional practices. Most monks were in many ways lax, easygoing, unwilling to reform, and some important vinaya rules of conduct were being ignored.[4] He was also anguished to find that Thai ordinations probably were invalid. He understood that the authentic line of descent from the Buddha for the Thai Sangha had been broken after the fall of Ayudhaya.[5] He vowed that he would disrobe if he did not receive some sign that the monastic line of succession back to the Buddha had not been broken in Thailand.[6] Shortly after making this vow Mongkut met with a Mon monk[7] who was a chief of the Mon sect, living at Wat Bowonmonkhon, a temple near Bangkok. From discussions with him, Mongkut became convinced that the Mon

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4 Nareumol Teerawat, *Nael-Kham-Kit Tang Karnmuang Kong Ratchakal Tee Sae* [The Political Thought of King Mongkut], (unpublished M.A Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1973), pp. 84-85.

5 Ayudhaya used to be the second capital of the Thai Kingdom (1350-1767).

6 Reynolds, C. James, *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*, (unpubished Ph.D., thesis, Cornell University, 1973), p. 79.

7 The Mon was an ethnic group with a long and venerable history in both Thailand and Burma.

monastic practice was closer to the original Buddhist practice as set out in the Vinaya. He returned to Wat Samorai to practice the new discipline and adopted it as his own and gathered a number of Thai monks of similar persuasion around him. They were reordained according to strictly defined ritual prescriptions and wore their monk's robes in the Mon style. [8]In 1836 Mongkut was appointed abbot of Wat Bowonniwet by Rama III, his group settled there and formed the center of what was to become a new stricter "sect" (nikaya or nikai) within the Thai Sangha.[9] Mongkut called his group of monks Thammayutnikai (Dhammayuti nikaya in Pali), meaning "those adhering strictly to the dhamma-vinaya" as contrasted with the Mahanikai (Maha nikaya) majority whom he deemed "those adhering to long standing habit". [10]

Mongkut's religious reforms were directed at upgrading monastic discipline (vinaya) and making it more orthodox. It involved changes in details of rituals and technical matters in the vinaya. The accent is on the correct procedures of the ordination ceremony,[11] correct pronounciation of the Pali language in recitation, the style of wearing the monastic robe, the fixing of the uposatha day (the days for special meetings of the order, and for recitation of vinaya rules) according to the real phase of the moon rather than according to the calender, the particular size and the position holding of alms-bowl. Thammayut monks were expected to eat only food that was placed in their alms-bowls and produced an unappetizing mix of foods while Mahanikai monks accepted side-dishes offered separately from the rice placed in

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8 The Mon monks wore their robes in such a way that both shoulders were covered. While the majority of Thai monks wore their robes to leave one shoulder bare. This style was adapted apparently to conform to a Pali textual reference that monks should not remove the outer shawl when entering a building. There is no prescribed style that can be attributed to the Buddha, see Tambiah, S.J., *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 210.

9 Tambiah: 1976, p. 209.

10 Kirsch, A.T., "Modernizing Implications of Nineteenth Century Reform in the Thai Sangha," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*. Smith B.L. ed. (ANIMA Books: 1978), p. 58.

11 Legitimate ordination has to take place on unencumbered land, but Mongkut saw that it was impossible to be absolutely sure that any in the Bangkok area was completly unencumbered. Hence, strictly considered any ordination carried out in Bangkok might be questionabl. Mongkut had himself reordained under what he took to be impeccable conditions -in his case on a raft moored in a river and insisted his followers do likewise. This method, called dalhikamma, was adopted because the raft on water was space untarished by private property rights (Kirsch: 1978, p. 58).

their alms-bowls.[12] The Thammayut monks were encouraged to attain some proficiency in meditation, Pali study and preaching extemporaneously using Pali stanzas as the themes rather than to read or recite memorized sermons filled with Pali words which laymen could not understand. They were very austere in following the 227 precepts of the vinaya while Mahanikai monks were more lax in this standards.

However, Mongkut's effort at religious reform also manifested another remarkable feature. Mongkut denied many traditional beliefs, particularly, Traiphumikatha (The Three World Cosmology), a famous religious text which had stood at the core of Thai traditional belief for centuries.[13] He argued that the notion of heaven and hell which was described in Traiphum was superstition incompatible with Buddhism. Mongkut also employed a rational view of Buddhism to criticize various miraculous legendary stories concerning the Buddha's Life as irrational accounts. He asserted that Buddhism is a rational religion and there is nothing in Buddhism opposing scientific views that he had learned in his contact with the Christian missionaries both while in his monkhood and later as king.[14]

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12 Kanungnit Chantabutr, *Karnkluanvei Kong Yuwasong Ruan Raeg 2477-2488* [The First Movement of Young Sangha 1934-1945] (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1985), pp. 10-11.

13 Traiphumikatha (The Three Worlds), a famous cosmological work composed in 1345 A.D. by a prince who later became king of Sukhothai.

In the Traiphum the universe was represented as consisting of an infinite number of solar systems, each depending on a central mountain, Mt. Meru. Around Mt. Meru there were belts of mountains and oceans littered with islands. The cosmos included three worlds which were divided into 31 levels. The highest world contained four levels, each level occupied by the high brahma deities (phrom in Thai). The middle world contained 16 levels occupied by lower grades of phrom deities. The lowest world consisted of 11 levels with human beings dwelling in the fifth level from the bottom. The six levels above the "world of mankind" were inhabited by beings of higher status than humans. Below it were hells, inhabited by spirits (phi) and demons (pret) of various sorts. The text describes the nature of each level, the conditions of existence for its inhabitants, how they came to be there and how they might change their status.

The central emphasis of the Traiphum was to illustrate the effects of good and evil kamma (merit and demerit). The destination of each category of beings and deities as determined by the kamma of each being. All beings were ranked, from demons to gods in a hierachy of merit which accrued according to kamma. It stresses the people who have good kamma are rewarded, in contrast with those who acquire bad kamma, after death. Rewards and punishments for certain kinds of good and bad kamma are described. For example, when a person who has accumulated great merit died, he goes to a higher level in the three worlds, depending on the amount of merit acquired while he was alive. He might even go straight to a phrom level, if he had sufficient merit (Krisch: 1978, p. 55).

14 Krisch: 1978, p. 58.

It is interesting to note that while Mongkut criticized many forms of traditional beliefs as superstitious, in some respects the Brahmanical deities were still worshipped by Mongkut.[15] The miraculous accounts credited to Mongkut himself at that time were not refuted by Thammayut monks but were widely accepted instead.[16] Moreover, the doctrine of kamma and multiple rebirths (reincarnation) were emphasized amongst them. They also made a strong distinction between material world and religious activity.[17] This interpretation is shared by Jackson who commented that Mongkut's religious rationalism was incomplete.[18]

Thammayut movement was highly devisive in character. It arose and developed in opposition to the established ecclesiastical authority of the time within the traditional Thai Sangha. Though Rama III had given Mongkut considerable support in his various monastic endeavors, the Mon style of wearing the monastic robe adopted by Mongkut troubled the King.[19]It was out of fear that Mongkut might impose a "foreign" style of dressing on the entire Sangha that Rama III rejected Mongkut's candidacy as his successor to the kingship.[20]

Mongkut left the Sangha and ascended to the throne on the death of Rama III in 1851. With a new role, he performed the traditional royal responsibility of supporting the Sangha as a whole. He did not impose the Thammayut discipline on the entire Sangha, but he clearly favored the Thammayutnikai that he himself had founded. Throughout the period of his rule (1851-1868) a series of religious and social reforms were carried out. He encouraged the introduction of western knowledge and technology which helped develop the structure of Thai society more in line with western practice. Simultaneously, a number of royal coronation ceremonies of divine kingship which were heavily Brahmanistic were replaced by a more Buddhist ceremony in order to emphasize the role of the king as a Buddhist monarch. This

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15 Jackson, Peter A., *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 1989), p. 59.

16 Naruemol: 1973, pp. 99-100.

17 Krisch: 1978, p. 58.

18 Jackson: 1989, p. 45.

19 Krisch : 1978, p. 56.

20 Ibid., p. 58.

has had the effect of gradually changing the public image of the monarch as Dhammaraja (a king who rules in accordance with the dhamma) or the righteous king who ruled with propriety, justice, and impartiality that persists until the present day.

However, the effect of Mongkut's reforms which generated the new sect within the Sangha not only created dissension but also brought a historical twist to the model of the relationship between the monarch and the Sangha. All later kings after Mongkut favored the of Thammayut sect, and the members of the royal family were ordained into it.

The initial impact of Thammayutnikai was felt most strongly by the very limited numerical strength of religious and secular leaders in the capital, especially, among the princes and members of the nobility. In the year Mongkut left the monkhood to assume the kingship in 1851, there were 130-150 Thammayut monks and seven Thammayut monasteries, compared with 28,000 Mahanikai monks.[21] However, the emphasis on the monastic standard base of the fundamentalist principle in its return to the original Buddhist practice had the effect of attracting interest in learning canonical texts, thereby producing canonical scholar-monks. And because of the royal patron, Thammayutnikai became more than just a group of monks seeking to tighten the discipline in their monasteries and among their followers. Its leaders later assumed important positions in the national ecclesiastical hierarchy and were very influential in activities.

The reform of monastic standards began to be translated into institutional forms to benefit the entire Sangha. In other words, the political support given to the Thammayutnikai greatly contributed to the expansion of its initial influence. Mongkut died in 1868. He was succeeded by his son Chulalongkorn whose long reign (1868-1910) brought Thai society into the modern world.

It is important now to analyse the socio-political change and religious development in

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21 Achara Kanchanomai, *Karn Fuan-Fu Phuttasasana Samai Thon Rattanakosin 2325-2394* [The Revival of Buddhism During the Early Bangkok 1782-1851] (unpublished M.A Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1979), p.154.

two periods, each representing a distinct type of regime: from 1868-1932 (the period under absolute monarchy), and the constitutional era (1932-).

Socio-Political Change and Religious Development- 1886-1932

Socio-Political Change

The impact of Western colonialism upon Thailand was first felt during King Mongkut's reign. Since then, socio-political modernization has become the aim of Thai leaders. It was during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) that socio-political change along Western lines was carried out. The early years of his reform were marked by political conflict around the throne which arose from disagreements over the need to reform. To avoid direct conflicts with the old powerful nobility who disapproved of any changes that might harm their power, Chulalongkorn set up a Council of the State and Privy Council with advisory, investigatory, and legislative powers, in order to launch a series of reforms.

Both Councils were dominated by young members of the royal family and noblemen who were educated in a combination of traditional Thai and modern Western styles. This group, as Wyatt noted, was youthful and had a reformimg zeal.[22] Initially, the traditional Thai machinery of government (since the 15th century) which was multifunctional with overlapping jurisdictions and functions was transformed into a modernized bureaucracy. A loosely organized provincial administration which endangered the territorial integrity and independence of the kingdom was centralized. The centralization of local administration resulted in the imposition of Thai political control over the fomerly semi-vassel states and brought about three rebellions in the north, the northeast, and the south.

While the government administration expanded, the government officials came into frequent contact with the masses both in the capital and in the provinces. Communication and transportation networks extended to the regions where security consideration were as

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22 Wyatt: 1969, p. 67.

important as economic and administrative concerns. Western medical standards were widely adopted, hospitals were set up, a water-supply system was constructed, and importance of Western knowledge and technology were recognized. Foreign experts were brought in to help reorganize the police, legal and court system as well as to advise on education, financial and economic policy.

It was during this period that the major concern of government was national education. Modern education was introduced to the provinces where more than 90 per cent of the nation's population lived. Significantly, the task of expanding mass education was placed in the hands of the Sangha. A program separate from the Ministry of Public Instruction was established under the leadership of Prince Wachirayan, a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn and the head of the Thammayut sect. The traditional association between education and Buddhist monasteries was maintained, but the content of the new education was adapted to the changing world. Wat Bowonniwet, the birthplace and stronghold of the Thammayut reform sect became a center of teaching and training in modern education for a number of monks.

The traditional education in Thailand prior to the reform was characterized by the lack of system, and little secular quality. It was organized in monastries in almost every village and town throughout the country. The education offered by the monks in all levels was free of charge. Classes were held when it suited the teacher-monk and pupil. The study centered on literacy, Buddhism and religious values.[23] Henceforth elementary schools were built in every province to act as the models for other schools; all monasteries were made places of study and abbots in every monastery were enlisted as teachers.

Monks taught monastic schools following the modern form and curriculum with government textbooks which provided not only a basic literacy and religious ideas but also modern mathematics, science, history and geography. Though the popular response to them at the beginning was extremely slow, by the turn of the century though there were 12,000

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23 Ibid., pp. 66-67.

monastic schools.[24] Village youths began to attend such schools in their local monasteries. Importantly, textbooks attracted the interest of many monks as they prepared to modernize the modern educational system in their schools. The younger monks and novices in the process of completing their education also attended modern schools. There was also a growing literacy rate as textbooks were widely printed and provided to various monasteries.

Linked with the rapidly growing government bureaucracy, specialist schools for training civil servants were opened, for example a law school, a medical school, school for training police, postmen, foresters, civil servants for railways. For higher education teaching colleges and a military academy were established in Bangkok. Over the years a number of deserving and able "King's Scholars" as well as members of the royal family and sons of nobility were sent to Europe to study and obtain western training. Through all these channels, the emphasis on recruitment was placed on educational qualifications of a formal, Western standard; and it was this recruitment standard that defined the early twentieth century Thai elite.[25]

The opening of the country for free trade through the Bowring Treaty partly encouraged a remarkably expanding rice cultivation for export by Thai farmers. Moreover, corvee labor was replaced by taxes and wage labor, and the abolition of "slavery" (typically a form of debt bondage), allowed free men to set up farms on their own. The government also granted examption from land tax for newly cultivated holdings. Thousands of peasants worked in effect full time in growing rice for the marketplace.

Between 1850 and 1907, rice exports increased from about 5 percent of the total crop produced to 50 percent.[26] Almost all rice exports came from the Central Plain -only 2

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24 Watson, K., *Educational Development in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Heinemann, 1980), p. 99.

25 By 1910, the 15,000 officials of the Interior Ministry outnumbered the 12,000 bureaucrats of which the entire salaried state bureaucracy had been composed in 1892. See Siffin, William, J., *The Thai Bureaucracy: Institutional Change and* Development (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966), pp. 90-94. Wyatt, D.K., *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982), p. 220.

26 Ingram, Jame C., *Economic Change in Thailand 1850-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), pp. 40-42.

percent from the largely subsistence holdings of the North and the Northeast.[27] Peasants generated cash income by producing a rice surplus, which was sold to the local and the Chinese middlemen who in turn would sell the rice mainly to the Chinese major firms that were part of an international network of rice dealers. The population in the central region had increased and the country's wealth was much augmented. Alongside with the economic change was the increase of the Chinese immigation to Thailand.[28] At the lowest economic level they were urban laborers and artisans; at the high level they were middlemen in the staple export trades - buying, storing, and transporting rice- and in retail throughout the country.[29] While Thai peasants were prospering through rice agriculture the Chinese middlemen profited by the rice-export economy. There was obviously the division of labor between Thai agriculture producers, Chinese middlemen, and Thai (elite) officials.

It was also during this period that political ideas challenging the position of the monarchy began to be expressed. A group of Western-educated princes and officials petitioned to King Chulalongkorn in 1886 for an end to absolute monarchy and the creation of a constitutional monarchy. This was, as Chai-anan stated, a totally new attitude toward politics in Thailand -the first time in Thai political history that the Western idea of citizenship had been proclaimed. The King took their criticism well and agreed for the need to change but expressed his doubt as to the applicability of Western political models and practices since there were not enough educated men available to assume such a broad range of executive and legislative responsibilities.[30]If the introduction of Western politics was the solution what was really needed was reform from inside. Reform and modernization, but not westernization, should be brought about by education.[31]

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27 Ibid., p. 44.

28 Chinese migrants had settled in Thailand since Ayudhaya period (probably earlier), but had began to immigrate in large numbers in the early nineteenth century. The Chinese population only in Bangkok in 1875 was estimated at 100,000, see Skinner, G. William, *Chinese Society in Thailand* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 87.

29 Girling: 1981, p. 62.

30 Chai-anan Samudavanija, "Political History" in *Government and Politics in Thailand*, Xuto Somsakdi, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 27.

31 Watson: 1980, p. 92.

Democratic ideas, however, were not limited to the Western-educated group but also appeared among the commoners. Tienwan, a commoner and Buddhist scholar, criticized the government system, bureaucratic abuse of power, and corruption in a magazine called Tulawipak Pojanakit published from 1900-1906.[32] Tienwan also pointed out that instituting a parliamentary form of government would be the most effective way to promote justice and the welfare of the people. He was caned and jailed for advocating a change to parliamentary form of government.

Similarly, Wachirayan Wiset, a journal for the Western educated (upper-class) Thai published an article "Sanuk Nuk" (Fun Thinking) by Krom Luang Phichit Preechakorn, a prominent young foreign-educated nobleman, was banned. This article discussed a conversation between four young Buddhist monks at Wat Bowoniwet the central temple of Thammayutnikai, about their future: some spoke of soon leaving the monkhood to resume civil service careers, while one rather matter-of-factly pointed out the practical advantages - economic security and peace of mind- offered by remaining in robes. The abbot of Wat Bowoniwet who was Supreme Patriarch of Thammayutnikai saw Phichit's article as an irreverent, insulting rapportage of the actual state of mind of young monks at the temple. Thus the publication of any further episodes of the conversation was forbiden.[33]

Social mobility was not the only issue giving rise to the democratic challenge. The birth of a free press at the turn of the century contributed to the spread of democratic ideology. Thailand, at that time, already had 47 magazines and 17 daily newspapers.[34] Articles on politics, commentaries on Thai society and the Sangha as well as science such as physic, chemistry, and medicine appeared in many magazines and newspapers.

Before his death in 1910, King Chulalongkorn had successfully engineered Thailand's transition to a centralized and more stable state -a condition unique to the rest of Southeast

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32 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 27.

33 Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. and Ruchira Mendiones, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in American Era* (Bangkok, Duang Kamol, 1985), p. 13.

34 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 23.

Asia.[35] Chulalongkorn was succeeded by his son Vajiravudh (Rama VI) who had been known for his literary gift and devoted little attention to political reform. During his reign he emphasized public relations and "nationalism".

The early years of King Vajiravudh's reign (1910-1925), absolute monarchy in many countries, such as Turkey, Russia, and China, was abolished. Chinese Nationalism (Kuomintang) spread among the Chinese in Thailand, fostering as it did allegiance to China.[36] Chinese society was beginning to have a coherence and self-consciousness which reflected in an increasing emphasis on chinese education: Chinese schools supported by Chinese community expanded. In 1910, the Thai government passed a capitation tax law, applicable to all residents in Thailand, irrespective of race. The Chinese secret societies ordered a general strike: Chinese business and shipping in Bangkok were brought to a standstill for three days. Not only were the Chinese seen to be devoid of any sense of justice but the extent of their economic stranglehold was fully realized for the first time.[37] Thereafter, growing resentment against the Chinese, which had for so long been felt by the Thai elites, were now shared by the mass of the people.[38]

It was expected that Vajiravudh, as the first Thai king educated in England, home of the prototype of parliamentary democracy, would adopt a more democratic form of government, but the king rejected the calls for an immediate change towards constitutional

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35 Pye, Lucian W., *Southeast Asia's Political Systems* (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), p. 23.

36 The tide of Chinese nationalism generated after after China's defeat by Japan in 1895 and was quickly felt in Southeast Asia, and its specific forms -the royalist reform party and revolutionary movement- were reflected in overseas Chinese (Skinner: 1957, 55).

37 Watson: 1980, p.119.

38 Thai government policy towards the Chinese resident in Thailand during the nineteenth century was generally favorable: unrestricted immigration and low direct taxation, except when the Chinese activities openly thwarted Thai sovereignty or threatened peace and order. Corruption, vice, even anarchy within nineteenth-century Chinese society were of no vital concern to the government so long as the Chinese continued to foster the country's trade and pay ever larger sums into the treasury in the form of annual tenders for the monopoly farms. Difficulties arose in connection with disturbances of the peace and the Chinese recourse to the protection of Western treaty powers. During Nangklao'reign (Rama III) and Chulalongkorn period, there were several Chinese rebellions and uprisings both in the capital and provinces. The most important of the riots in Bangkok occurred in 1868, 1883, 1889, and 1895 (Skinner: 1957, 143-4).

monarchy. He saw that the majority of the people were not educated enough to sustain effective parliamentary government. Although a model of local self-government known as Dusit Thani was introduced, this experiment was limited to a small group of courtiers and never spread outside the palace.

In 1912, a group of junior army and civil officials attempted to stage a coup to replace the absolute monarchy with the republican government. King Vajiravudh responded forcefully to the challenge by publishing several articles, attacking republicanism. He also wrote a series of press articles under the pen-name Asavapahu (Pegusus) attacked the Chinese as the "Jew of the East". The main gist of them was the Chinese accepted the privileges of citizenship but they refused to undertake its duties. They were united by loyalty to their race but not to their adopted country, for they were out to make as much money as possible and then depart. He urged the Thais to take a more active role in their own economy.

The king took, moreover, an active step to promote the spirit of "nationalism" in his people. Boy Scouts' Organization and the Wild Tigers'Corps[39] (Sua Pa) were created in order to promote the unity of Thai nation and identity which lay in the evocation of a sense of communal self-consciousness and to install in the mind of people of own race, devote and loyalty towards the Nation, Religion, and Monarch (chat, sasana, and phramahakasat). All these were the High Authority that controls and maintains justice and independence of the nation; it was thus something worth fighting and dying for.

It was King Vajiravudh's reign that compulsory education was announced, requiring boys and girls to attend schools.[40] Private schools had been also started. The status of civil servant colleges was raised to that of a university called Chulalongkorn university, the first university in Thailand. The most striking result of the act was the dramatic increase in girls'enrolment. Women did not lag behind in education. They went in for law,

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39 The Wild Tiger, a nationwide paramilitary corps, served the King as a kind of territorial army after the British pattern, see Syamananda, Rong, *A History of Thailand* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1981), p 148.

40 Thailand became the second Asian countries, after Japan, to introduce compulsory education (Watson: 1980, 105).

jurisprundence, teaching, arts, medicine and science.[41] Social status was much more broadly dispersed. A person's social position became dependent on education. King Vajiravudh spent many years writing a variety of articles and plays espousing modern values and patterns of behavior designed to mobilize the educated section of Thai populace. It was largely through his influence that the Thais assumed surnames, public holidays, international New Year, and adopted Western dressing, sports, and athletics.

Significantly, King Vajiravudh's period was marked as the age of popular press of daily newspapers and weekly magazines. The freedom of the press was granted and enjoyed to an enormous extent. More newspapers took up political themes. Articles attacking and challenging the traditional basis of legitimacy and essays concerned with the conflict between Western and Thai culture or personal and social cost of modernization appeared in the pages of daily newspapers. Notable journalists and essayists who trenchantly criticized the government policy, the existing social, and economic order were commoners, namely Tienwan and K.S.R Kulap. The king himself was rather pleased with his writings which debate the newspaper writers that criticized his government.[42]

There was increased publication of fictions, essays, translation of Western novels, and books in wide range of fields such as Buddhist and agricultural journals. It was also the period when the well-educated, urban class expressed themselves in writing and elite opinion was being shaped through the popular press. The government and the educated elites regarded newspapers as the voice of public opinion. In the First World War, newspapers played an important role in encouraging the government to enter the war on the side of the Allies in order to end the unequal treaties of the nineteenth century.[43] Pro-Allies articles came out in press. Military interest and military values grew among the people as the war progressed, and

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41 Watson, K., op. cit., p.107.

42 Pornperom Aemtham, *Botbat thang Karnmuang kong Nangsuaphim Thai nai Samai Karnpativat 2475 lae lang Songkarmlok krang thi song* [The Political Role of Thai Newspapers from the Revolution of 1932 and the End of the Second World War] (Bangkok: Thaiwatanapanich, 1977), p. 12.

43 Wyatt: 1982, p.230.

in 1917, the Thai government declared war on the Allies.[44] By 1920, the number of newspapers and weekly magazines expanded from 59 to 149 including those for women run by women.[45] In Bangkok, there were seven Thai, three English, and three Chinese daily newspapers. They multiplied and competed with one another for the print-market. The professional writers and journalists emerged as a new figure in Thai society.

During the postwar period, Thailand suffered severely from the economic crisis. Rice, Thailands'chief export went through a brief boom-bust cycle in 1919-1921. The balance of trade incurred an enormous deficit. A disastrous crop year between 1919-20 brought economic chaos. One major contributor to the situation was royal progligacy and the rapid increase of public expenditures.[46] Government revenues were declining steadily. Financial crisis became one of the pressing problems facing the new King, Prajadhipok (1925-1935) on his accession to the throne.

Once the crisis had passed and political criticism died down, anti-Japanese trade boycotts among the Chinese arose in Thailand, Communist versus Nationalist struggled among them. At the same time Thailand also became a base for Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, and Burmese Nationalists working against colonial rule in their home countries. In the late 1920s there was communist activity in Thailand involving other ethnic groups, particularly the work of Ho Chi Minh among the Vietnamese minority in the northeast Thailand. The exposure through the daily press to nationalist politics in the neighboring countries had a great impact on the intellectuals in Thailand.

It was from 1910 onwards that the absolute monarchy as a system of government gradually lost its appeal and legitimacy among a growing group of intellectuals and bureaucrats. Government became increasingly professional in the hands of civil servants and

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44 The only other Southeast Asians involved in the war were 200,000 Vietnamese employed as coolies in France (Wyatt: 1982, p. 230).

45 Kanperom Suwannanon, *Phrabatsomdetphramongkutklao chao yoo hua kab Karnsaang chat* [King Vajiravudh and His Nation Building Programmes] (unpublished M.A Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok,1980), p.83.

46 Wyatt: 1982, p. 233.

military officials. These changes were signified by the transfer of power and authority from the monarch to the new elites; the military and the bureaucrats who had returned from studying abroad. This shift came not only from Western imposition but also from the kings themselves. In other words, the new elite groups were the product of the changes that the monarchy introduced.[47] Constitution and democracy for Thailand was considered during King Prajadhipok's reign but the King's advisers both the high ranking princes and foreigners agreed that while constitutional government might be desirable and even inevitable, it was still premature to establish such a system in the country.[48]

Since the mid-1920s, the overwhelming majority of young men who studied in Europe returned home with their western ideas of democratic government. At the same time, the expansion of bureaucray came to a sudden halt due to financial difficulties, chances of promotion decreased and limits on upward mobility which led to dissatisfaction with the absolute monarchical government. Moreover, the world economic depression which started in 1929 hit Thailand badly. The price of rice dropped by two thirds. With greatly reduced cash income, peasants could not pay their taxes.

The government chose not to resort to increasing taxes which would cause suffering for the people but instead cut the government expenditure by cutting the budget of all the ministries drastically, retrenching many hundreds of government officials, and reducing official salaries while increasing taxes on salaries.[49] All these severely affected the government officials more than any other group. In other words, the Thai middle class was hit hard while the Chinese and the upper class and royalty were taxed lightly. Economic crisis, in turn, had bred political problems at various levels. In June 1932, a group of young military and civil official calling themselves the People's Party staged the bloodless coup which replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy.

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47 Suksamran, Somboon, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (London, C.Hurst & Company, 1977), p. 47.

48 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 30.

49 Ibid., p. 29.

Religious Impact

The development of Thai Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was inextricably related to the process of socio-political stabilization and change. The implication of Mongkut's monastic reform were carried out by his son, Chulalongkorn, and indeed the major change in Thai Buddhism took place during King Chulalongkorn's reign as part of the "modernization" of the country. As I have mentioned, the need for educational reform and the spread of modern education on a country-wide basis led King Chulalongkorn to place the provincial education in the hand of a princely monk, Wachirayan (1859-1921), the head of Thammayut sect, who later became the supreme patriarch.

Prince Wachirayan decided first to reorganize the Sangha administration to discharge this secular responsibility. The Sangha Act was enacted in 1902 and with the support of royal authority, Prince Wachirayan launched the programs of Sangha reform. The thrust of the reform of the Sangha administration, however, not only came from the secular aim of spreading modern public education but also from the need for national integration and the unification of the Sangha itself, including the need to purify the Sangha.

The Sangha administration prior to the reform was characterized by the lack of systematic and clearly defined Sangha administration, a loosely organized provincial administration, and an absence of the centralization of power.[50] The Sangha Order was divided into three main divisions: division of the north (khana nua), the central (khana klang), and the south (khana tai).[51] Each had its own patiarch to rule the division without any supreme authority over the administration of the whole Order. The monasteries were the basis of administration and there was no monk who had authority over the administration of other monasteries. The relationship between monasteries arose from the relationships of

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50 Suksamran, Somboon, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Stuties, 1982), p. 36.

51 Niramol Kangsadara, "Prince Wachirayan's Reforms in the Buddhist Order (1898-1921)," *in Anuson Walter Vella* (In Memory of Professor Vella), Renard Ronald D. ed. (Chiang Mai: Walter F. Vella Fund, 1989), p. 253.

teacher to student, leader to follower. This informal monastery network effectively bypassed the formal structure of authority within and without the Sangha.[52] Many monasteries were semi-independent of the formal control of the civil and Sangha authority. Scholar-monks had the chance to advance themselves to high ranks through the ecclesiastical examination while administrative skill was not valued highly for promotion.[53]

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52 Ibid.,

53 Ibid., p. 249.

Through the Sangha Act of 1902, the formerly autonomus grouping of monks which had their own variant tradition of Theravada Buddhism in the northern, northeastern, and southern was brought into a unified Sangha structure. The hierarchical ecclesiatical structure with the supreme patriarch (Sangharat) at the top became a firmly established institution. The Sangha administration consisted of four parts (khana yai), three which were divisions of the Mahanikai sect -the north, south, and central regions- the fourth being the Thammayut sect, which was given for the first time official recognition as a separate entity within the Sangha. Each division had a senior monk as governor general (chao khana yai), who in turn had a deputy. These eight elders formed a Council of Elders (mahatherasamakhom) which was the highest authority in the Sangha hierarchy, acting as an administrative body and an ecclesiastical tribunal.[54] The hierarchical level in between the governors general and their deputies at the top and the vast numbers of abbots of monasteries at the bottom were the four important levels: monthon (circles), changwat (provinces), amphor (districts), and tambon (sub-districts); and each level had ecclesiastical governors. This hierarchy paralleled the civil administrative structure in all levels and were under the government control and supervision. In short, the 1902 Act produced a degree of unprecendented centralization in the Thai Sangha.[55]

In addition, every monk and novice had to be registered upon entering the Order and had to have a certificate of identity issued by the abbot. They must have fix residency in monasteries. Vagrant monks would be arrested and forced to disrobe. National standards for monks, monastic disciplines, and Buddhist rituals were for the first time set down in writing such as qualificational restriction on ordainer, abbot, and upatcha (a monk who can give ordination); consecrated areas within which the ordination ceremony is legally valid. Monks were encouraged to partipate in administrative works as well as in academic one. Ranks (samanasak) and titles (ratchathinnanam) were conferred on them for each field.

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54 Suksamran: 1982, p. 38.

55 The notion of the monastical control of the Sangha did not begin with the Sangha Act of 1902. Indeed evidence of such control survives from the Sukhothai, Ayudhaya, and early Ratanakosin periods. But it concern only royal monasteries that the king appointed monks to ecclesiastical officeo, and most of the royal monasteries were in the capital, see Ishii, Yoneo, *Sangha, State, and Society: The Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 71-72.

Appointments to office came to be made on the basis of the candidate's ability and it became possible for competent monks to rise to high office. Under the Sangha Act of 1902, the foundation of the ecclesiastical administration was laid to link Bangkok with the approximately 80,000 monks and novices scattered throughout the country.[56]

Significantly, the reform of Sangha education was carried out to elevate the level of Buddhist study.[57] Hitherto, the traditional ecclesiastical studies mainly rested on popular Buddhist scriptures such as Traiphum and Phra Malai.[58] Even the traditional "doctrinal study" (rian pariyattham) was no more than Pali language study and it was only in a handful of urban monasteries and Thammayut sect at wat Bowoniwet; in almost none of the provincial monasteries were these scriptures ever read. Although, state eccelesiastical instruction had long been established in Thailand, only a tiny proportion of monks became parian (the Pali degree) and advanced in Tipitaka. Partly, because of the difficulty of learning Pali through the classical grammars, and strict traditional examination which consisted of only oral translations of Pali texts, verbatim rendition into Thai, candidates were permitted to give only one answer and could not correct themselves. Moreover, the examination was held only once every three years.[59] These reasons caused many monks to abandon their studies. A systematic understanding of Buddhist doctrine was virtually inaccessible to the average monk.

In order to redress the paucity of doctrinal knowledge among monks and novices which partly came from the lack of suitable doctrinal textbooks, Wachirayan wrote many textbooks for instruction of newly ordained monks such as Nawakowat (Buddhist teachings for newly ordained monks), Phutthaprawat (The Life of the Buddha), Phutthasasana Suphasit

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56 Ishii: 1986, p. 71.

57 On tour of the Chantaburi region in 1887, King Chulalongkorn was amazed at the nonsense he had heard preached at the monasteries where he stopped, and sent a letter to Prince Wachirayan stressing the need for reform of ecclesiastical education (Ishii: 1986, p. 86).

58 Phra Malai, another popular Buddhist work, found widely not only in Thailand but in many parts of Southeast Asia. This work is reportedly based on the Ceylonese (Metteyasutta). It tells the legend of a ceylonese monk, having attained supernatural powers through his ascetic practices, traveled around heaven and hell, and eventually met with the Future Buddha, Sri Ariya Metteyya. This story describes the conditions of heaven and hell and sets the belief that Sri Ariya Metteyya will one day come to this world to save mankind (Ishii: 1986, p. 184).

59 Ishii: 1986, p. 85.

(Selected Buddhist proverbs), Winayamuk (The entrance to the Vinaya). At the same time, a new curriculum of doctrinal studies (nak tham) with a written mode of examination in Thai language was introduced.[60] It provided both monks and laymen with the means and opportunity to understand the Buddhist doctrine in their own language and to express in Thai their understanding the dhamma. The Thammayut sect played an important role in spreading the new curriculum throughout the country. Many local temples opened nak tham schools (school of doctrinal studies) and held their own examinations while in Bangkok, the number of teaching schools was increased and examinations were held.[61] Through this way Wachirayan's theology became established as the orthodox doctrine of Thai Buddhism.

Along with the introduction of the doctrinal study, the traditional curriculum of Pali study was revised in order to combine the two levels of ecclesiastical study.[62] However, the Pali Text used for study, non of them belongs to the Pali Tipitaka; are all extracanonical commentaries and still concentrated on Pali-to-Thai and Thai-to-Pali translation, interpretation is not acceptable.[63] Wachirayan, moreover, wrote a Pali study book in six volumes (Bali Waiyakon) which had greatly alleviated the difficulties of learning Pali. The traditional Pali examination was replaced by a new form of written mode of examination, and was held annually. Thammacaksu (the eye of dhamma), the first Buddhist journal was issued by Thammayut sect. The Tipitaka was revised and the first complete set of the Tipitaka was published in book form , and 1,000 sets were distributed to the main monasteries in the country. Two Buddhist universities, Mahamakut and Mahachulalongkorn, were established in Bangkok, one for each of the two sects, providing for monks advanced Buddhist studies

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60 Wachirayan's books, particularly, Nawakowat was set as the most important textbook which almost all monks studied. Likewise, it also became the basis textbook of doctrinal study for laymen. It presented Buddhist doctrines and history with reference to canonical text, commentaries, and accepted historical sources rather than with reference to any popular texts (Ishii: 1986, p. 89).

61 Ishii: 1986, p. 91.

62 The new curriculum of doctrinal studies consisted of three grades: elementary level (nak tham tri), intermediate level (nak tham tho), and advanced level (nak tham ek). Success in these exams was made an essential qualification for candidacy for Pali studies which began at grades 3 to 9. And success in the Pali exams earned a monk the appellation of parian degree (maha parian), a nitayaphat nitayaphat allowance from the king, the respect of society, and opened the way way to advancement within the Sangha (Ishii: 1986, p. 77).

63 Ishii: 1986, p. 95.

along with modern higher education.

Wachirayan's achievements were significant for the future of the Thai Sangha. His reform established the stability of the Sangha organization and the continuous development of Thai Buddhism. It was for the first time in Thai history that a national Buddhist ecclesia was organized and has been one of the nation's greatest institutions. During the reign of King Vajiravudh and Prajadhipok, Buddhism was designated as one of the three pillars of Thai nationalism: Nation, Religion, and Monarch. Each depended on the others and had to be preserved if the Thai nation was to survive and progress.

Constitutional Era (1932-)

Socio-Political Change since 1932

After 1932, with the monarchy and aristocracy being moved from political power, a growing conflict developed between the civilian and military components of the Coup group. The dominant civilian leader, Pridi Phanomyong, a successful student at the Sorbonne Law Faculty, and chief public exponent of the People Party's claimed to be inaugurating a new era of democratization and social reform. Around him gathered progressive politicians, journalists, academics and writers. Perhaps symbolic of his role was his founding in 1934 of Thai's second university, Thammasat, which ever since has been the most important institutional center for the spreading and defence of democratic ideas in Thai society.[64] Meanwhile the military came under Plaek Phibunsongkhram, educated in France (St. Cyr military academy) who became the proponent of a rightwing populist nationalism.

It was Pridi's group who dominated the first constitutional regime until the late 1930s. The new regime faced an unstable political situation: a provincial military rebellion, conflicts between the military and civilian political groups.[65]The majority of the people had little

64 Anderson & Ruchira: 1985, p. 16.

65 Suchit Bunbongkarn, "Political Institutions and Processes," in *Government and Politics of Thailand*, Xuto Somsakdi, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 42.

interest in "democratic system". The lack of mass support made the People's Party modify political structure and to respond to the non emergence of "real parliamentary democracy."[66] Moreover, the conflict between King Prajadhipok and the government developed due to the undemocratic nature of the new regime and this led the King voluntarily to abdicate in 1935. From then on until after World War II, the function of the monarchy were performed by a Council of Regents.

As far as religion is concerned the commoner-recruited political leaders continued to support Buddhism and the Constitution of the Kingdom reaffirmed in law the traditional relationship between the King and Buddhism: "The King professes the Buddhist Faith and is the Upholder of Religion".[67] The Sangha adapted itself to the new politics while the Supreme Patriarch stressed the Sangha's stance in support of the government.

Inevitably, the new political ideas penetrated into the temple grounds and many young monks in Bangkok formed themselves and expressed a need for reform in the administration of monasteries (wats). This movement, however, was short-lived; the ringleaders were forced to disrobe under the order of the Supreme Patriarch. At the same time, the popularization of Buddhism had begun. Groups of well-educated laymen came to the fore in rationalizing Buddhist teaching, in organizing religious organizations such as Samakhom Phutthamamaka, the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), in spreading Buddhism through the medium of schools. Samakhom Parien aimed at raising the educational standards of the Sangha and made all monks worthy of respect.[68]

There was also even an attempt to interpret Pali Canon and open a meditation center in a remote district of Chaiya, Surat-Thani province. The general trend of the religious thinking of this period was to return to pristine Buddhism as a way of life, back to ethics as oppose to rituals, miracles, superstitions, and accepted beliefs in the light of scientific thought. The usual solution among the minority of the highly vocal intellectual Buddhists was to

66 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 30.

67 Ishii: 1986, p. 100.

68 Landon, Kenneth P., *Siam in Transition* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 223.

explain that science and Buddhism are rational and that Buddhism supplied what science lacks in ethics and morals.[69] In 1934, a missionary movement led by an Italian Buddhist monk, Phra Lokanat, organized 64 Thai monks to go to Rome for the purpose of foreign mission work.[70]

With the liberal atmosphere, Thammayutnikai was placed in a defensive position. Certain questions were raised: criticisms related to the predominance of Thammayut monks in the provincial administration, the centralization of power in the Council of Elders (Mahatherasamakhom) which was mainly in the hands of an administrative elite of Thammayut monks.[71] In 1935, a delegation of about two thousand Mahanikai monks from twelve provinces arrived in Bangkok to petition the prime minister to transfer the Sangha administration in line with democratic principles, including the unequality of treatment for the both sects. The new political leaders tended to support the majority sect (Mahanikai) rather than the aristocratic Thammayutnikai.[72] However, the request was not granted by the Assembly until 1938.

In 1938, Plaek was appointed Prime Minister. It was an age of militant nationalism. The national reconstruction was proclaimed through three main policies: economic nationalism, the development of a sense of national unity, and the creation of a literate population through education. "State enterprises" were established, and the Thai people were encouraged to engage in trade and banking, and numerous occupations were reserved for Thais. The co-operative movement was expanded among farmers. A series of ten State Conventions were issued aimed at uplifting the national spirit and moral code of the nation, and instilling a newness into Thai life such as the use of national language, to salute the flag and know the national anthem.

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69 Ibid., p.227.

70 Ibid., p. 226.

71 The Sangha Act of 1902 permitted Thammayutnikai to control a significant proportion of the powerful positions at the upper level of the Sangha. Although the Act stipulated that Thammayut monks could govern Mahanikai monks and vice versa, in practice Thammayut monks refused to be governed by Mahanikai monks. They insisted their separate and priviledged status was received from the founder, King Mongkut. This conflict is still in practice until today (Jackson: 1989, p. 69).

72 Reynolds, Frank E., "Civil Religion and National Community in Thailand," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, No 2, 1977, p. 276.

People were encouraged to work hard in order to achieve a good standard living. It was the first time that the whole set of Tipitaka was translated into Thai language in order to be available to all people. The government, moreover, attempted to unify the two sects of Thai Sangha by building Wat Phrasimahathat, where monks of both sects would coordinate, and plan a council of the dhamma-vinaya; and use its power of appointment to turn the imbalance in the Sangha's power structure, introduced by the Sangha Act of 1902 which had been enacted on the initiative of Prince Wachirayan.

In 1941, a new Sangha Act was passed which contained democratic features, the tripartite separation of powers: the structure of the cabinet system (Khana Sangkhamontrii) together with the Supreme Patriarch as the President which had limited power, legislative assembly (Sangkhasaphaa), judicial division (Khana Winaithon), and various levels and agencies of administration. Accordingly, the administrative structure of the Sangha became once again a replica of the political and administrative system of the civil government.[73]

It was under Plaek's regime that economic nationalism was combined with anti-Chinese sentiments. This resulted partly from the large amount of money remitted each year by Chinese to China which was a serious obstacle to the development of Thai economy.[74] A series of anti-Chinese enactments were put into effect: restricting Chinese immigration, increasing taxes on the commercial class, and all aliens were required to pay a registration fee. The number of Chinese schools was reduced from 218 to 61 and by 1944 only two Chinese schools remained open in the whole country. Ten of eleven Chinese newspapers were closed and several prominent Chinese were jailed and deported for remitting money to China.[75] Despite Plaek's dictatorial rule, during his office (1938-1944) the military played an important role in protecting the Constitution.[76] With all these efforts, Plaek was able to establish himself

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73 Suksamran: 1982, p. 42.

74 These remittances between 1946-1949 were estimated at 25-30 million baht a month (about U.S $ 1.25-1.5 million) (Girling: 1981, p. 77).

75 Watson : 1980, pp. 125-6.

76 Suchit: 1987, p. 45.

as an unchallenged national leader. When the Second World War broke out, he brought Thailand on the side of the Axis power and this led to Plaek's fall from power. During the war Pridi, who was appointed Regent of the young king, Ananda (Rama VIII), organized an underground Free Thai Movement against the Japanese and this helped to mitigate the harse demands imposed on Thailand when the war ended.

After World War II, the great powers profoundly affected Thai life and politics. Pridi dominated Thai politics and presided over Thailand's first Parliament election. The civilian government was faced with disastrous post-war economic and social problems: rapid inflation, serious rice shortage, unemployment, corruption amongst government officials and politicians, and particularly the mysterious death of King Ananda. These led to the Coup of 1947 which forced Pridi into exile and inaugurated a quarter of a century of almost unbroken military government. Because of the growing communist threat in Indochina, Malaysia, Burma, and the decline of Kuomintang in China, the Western allies welcomed the military government into the anti-communist fold. The post-war military regime differed from the pre-war one in the sense that they were heavily supported by the United States, which aimed to prevent the further expansion of Communist China in Southeast Asia.[77]

Plaek's post-war regime was far less stable than his previous one. The real power was in the hands of his two rival subordinates, Police General Phao Sriyanon and Army General Sarit Thanarat. They came from provincial small towns, and were educated wholly in Thailand.[78] Phao in particular became a dreaded figure for organizing the imprisonment, and assassination of political opponents, including progressive politicians and intellectuals. This period was also a difficult time for the Chinese, particularly after the triumph of Communism in China (1949) the military regime equated anti-Communism with being anti-Chinese.[79]

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77 Anderson & Ruchira: 1985, p. 17.

78 Ibid.

79 Chinese schools were deduced from 490 to 148, 10,000 immigrants a year was cut to 200, the alien registration fee was raised to 400 baht, Chinese newspapers were closed. This followed by riots, a great fire in suburb of Bangkok in which hundreds of houses were destroyed and 20,000 rendered homeless. The government quelled the riots by shooting the "ringleaders," mass arrests and deportations followed (Watson: 1980, p. 127).

During the mid 1950s, the power-struggle between Phao and Sarit[80] led to Sarit's coup in 1957 which drove Phao and Plaek into exile.

Sarit came to power at the period of great American alarm about "Red China" expansionism in Southeast Asia. Thailand was conceived as a bastion of the "free world" and its strength and stability was regarded vital to the United State in the period of "cold war" in Asia.[81] During Sarit's regime (1958-63) and that of his successors Thanom Kittikhachorn and Praphat Charusathian (1963-1973), Thai security in the widest sense required an intensification of political and administrative control which combined an emphasis on national development, national integration with traditional symbols of king and Buddhism. Sarit abrogated the constitution, dissolved parliament, and banned all political parties. The country began to experience the period of absolutism and strong anti-communism: popular participation in politics was totally prohibited; the press was severely restricted; hundreds of critics, politicians, writers, monks were arrested and accused of being communists, and most of them were imprisoned without trial.

At the same time a sectarian conflict between Thammayut and Mahanikai was sparked off in 1958 due to the strong schismatic character of the Thammayut sect and a disagreement between the two sects over the succession to the Supreme patriarchate. Sarit saw the discord in the Sangha as reflective of the democratic features introduced by the Sangha Act of 1941. If the Sangha was to be an effective tool for national integration, it must be strong, disciplined, and well organized.[82] The administration of the Sangha, for him, was not a matter to be based on the principle of separation of powers for the sake of balance among both sects as was the case under the current law.[83] The government also believed that communists were operating in the Sangha. Thus every problem occurring in the Sangha such

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80 Phao who controlled the police and was strongly backed by CIA for his help supporting clandestine Kuomintang operations inside Southwestern China and Sarit who controlled the army, and was backed by the Pentagon for his role in modernizing the military along American line (Anderson & Ruchira: 1985), p. 17.

81 Anderson & Ruchira: 1985, p. 19. and Girling: 1981, p. 233.

82 Ishii: 1986, p.116.

83 Ibid.

as the conflicts among administrative monks, criticism of government and the Sangha by monks, were seen as part of a communist plot to destroy Buddhism and to induce people to lose faith in the religion and the Sangha.

In 1962, the Sangha Act 1941 was abolished and replaced by the Act of 1962. The new Act swept away all the democratic provisions of the 1941 Act and concentrated power in the person of the supreme patriarch. It provided for an organization through which he could control the Sangha through a Council of Elders, allowing him to dominate the council through his power to appoint the majority of members. This together with the abolition of the ecclesiastical assembly and cabinet, represented a strengthening of the Supreme Patriarch's power to an uprecedented degree.[84] The 1962 Act faithfully reflected once again the change of Thai political system of that day.

It was under Sarit's government that the first national economic development plan (1961-1966) was announced; regional centers had been set up in the North, Northeast, and South; many state enterprises were dismantled, and offered very favorable conditions for foreign investment. By 1964, there were huge American military expenditures in Thailand as the Indochina war intensified; Thai economy went into a sustained decade-long boom.[85] Development of infrastructure, such as highways, ports, communication system, electrification, irrigation dams brought large numbers of peasants into commercial economy increasingly geared to exports.[86] Foreign capital and private investment spread to many parts of the country. There was substantial growth in regional centers and in other towns such as important industries and manufactures were located in the Center; a commercial center for rubber in the South; and eight American military bases in the Northeast and the East. There

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84 Ibid., p. 118.

85 The total U.S. "regular military assistance" to the Thai armed force from 1951 to 1971 amounted to $ 935.9 million. A further $ 760 million was spent for the acquisition of military equipment and payment for a Thai division to fight in Vietnam ($ 200 million over 4 years). U.S payment for construction of air and naval bases amounted to a further $ 250 million. Expenditures by American servicemen in Thailand for "rest and recreation" and other items added a further $ 850 million (Girling: 1981, p. 236).

86 From 1950 to 1975, the United State provided Thailand with $ 650 million in support of ecomonic development programs. Most of the money was granted in the years after Sarit's ascension to power (Girling: 1981, p. 235).

had been enormous increase in administrative, executive, professional and technical personnel both in government and private sector. The expanding of middle class was evident.

In the farming sector, while the amount of usable land increased only one per cent a year, the population growth had been over 3 per cent annum for many decades.[87] Consequently, landholdings became smaller. Inequalities in land tenure and rent, the insecurity of tenant farmers, and rural indebtedness were other serious problems. Rapidly rising land prices which produced a new stratum of provincial rich, force large number of dispossessed peasants migrated to urban in search of work. The urban laborforce, which until World War II had consisted largely of Chinese immigrants, became more and more Thai.

Educational expansion took place along with economic development, new universities and technical colleges were founded in the provincial centers. The tenfold increase in the number of university graduates over the previous two decades, from less than a hundred thousand to nearly a million, coupled with a similar rise in the number of secondary school graduates, has given Thailand's middle class a mass.[88] More and more able young Thai were going to the United States for advanced study, rather than to Europe (especially England) as had been before.[89]

In the same period, two Buddhist universities have widened the secular learning. They provided their students with secular courses such as Asian studies, political thought, sociology, economics, education, and public administration. A number of monks, moreover, furthered their studies abroad, especially in India. Many young monks from Mahachulalongkorn (the Buddhist University of Mahanikai), are involved in two government programs: the Thammajarik and Thammathut sought to integrate the hilltribes into Thai society, and to strengthen the allegiance of remote Thai populations to the Thai policy in order to counter the spread of communist ideology. These partly contributed to the growing

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87 Suksamran: 1982, p. 63.

88 Wyatt: 1982, p. 295.

89 By 1973, 6000 Thais were studying in the U.S alone. By the late 1970s, about 36,000 Thais go abroad to study every year (some 30,000 of them to the United State) (Girling: 1981, pp. 82, 150).

social and political consciousness among them.

In 1969, a general election was held, and Thanom continued to be prime minister. In 1971, they staged a coup against their own constitution and returned to an absolutist regime. Factionalism within the ruling military clique grew and led to the shattering of the unity of the military high command. In upcountry areas, communist insurrections and rural insurgency increased, and in the increasingly violent fighting the government suffered losses.[90] The economic growth rate dropped, and the inflation rose alarmingly which accelerated the public loss of confidence in the ability of the military to govern. A growing coalition of students, academics, intellectuals, professionals, journalists, and politicians began to exert increasing pressure on the military regime.[91] In October 1973, the massive demonstration of people organized by the Soon Klang Nisit Naksuksa Haeng Pratet Thai (National Student Center of Thailand, NSCT) called for the new constitution which led to the collapse of the dictatorship and the exile of Thanom, Praphat.

In the aftermath of October 14, 1973, the King appointed Sanya Thammasak, a former rector of Thammasat university and president of Supreme Court and Privy Council, as prime minister and it was accepted by the students and public. The military was, for a time, removed from the center of power while the NSCT became the driving force for social reform. It was an era of hope and anticipation during which common people expressed grievances and expected to see things changed. Several voluntary associations and political oriented groups were formed, important among them were the NSCT, Prachachon Phau Prachathipathai (the People for Democracy, PDG), Sahapan Naksuksa Issara Haeng Prathet Thai (the Federation of Independent Students of Thailand, FIST), Sahaphab Chaona Haeng Prathet Thai (the Federation of Farmers of Thailand, FFT), and Sahaphab Kammakorn (the Labour Unions). Similarly, groups of monk-students from two Buddhist universities were organized for various purposes, Ongkan Saha Dhammik (Organization of Sangha

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90 Suksamran: 1982, p. 62.

91 For example, in 1972 students protested against the government Decree 299 which was designed to consolidate the regime's power by placing the judiciary under direct bureaucratic control, see Phudhisan Jumbala, "Interest and Pressure Groups," in *Government and Politics of Thailand*, Xuto Somsakdi, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.138.

Brotherhood) supported the movements that were fighting for equality and justice in economic, political and social matters, and worked closely with the secular leftist movement, [92] Yuwasong (Young Monks) confined its activities within the Sangha affairs such as the campaign for reform of the Sangha administration and education.[93] While the Buddhacak, a monthly Buddhist journal of Mahachulalongkorn discussed political, economic and social problems that the monks themselves experienced in the villages.

The interim government encountered all aspects of social, political, and economic demands: strikes and demonstrations in many industries, schools, police, teachers, farmers, and monks. Buddhist monks marched in the demonstration of the Farmers' Federation demanding that the government allocate land for farming and solve unfair land losses of the farmers. This unprecedented act was strongly criticized from many sectors of Thai society: the high military leader of that time said that the monks'action was the end of everything and there was nothing more serious than this; the president of Buddhist Association said that the event signified that Buddhism was under serious threat as the moral base of the nation; and the government believed that the monks were instigated by communists.[94]

The mushrooming of pressure groups and free press contributed to the development of the most free political atmosphere that Thailand had ever experienced. The socialist ideas were revealed through daily newspapers, weekly magazines, and irregular pamphlets, as well as the profoundly intellectual works of Marx, Lenin, and Mao. The writings of Thai Marxist intellectuals, such as Kulap Saipradit, Pridi Phanomyong, were reissued; the thought and lives of the Third World heroes for instance Chou En Lai, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara, appeared in bookshops.[95] In 1974 and early 1975 the NSCT and the government organized the large group of students involved in the program of democracy propagation in the rural areas throughout the country. As urban well-educated youth experienced rural poverty, many of them became much more politicized. Some of them took the opportunity to pass on

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92 Suksamran: 1982, p. 90.

93 Ibid., pp. 84-85.

94 Ibid., p. 108.

95 Ibid., p. 73.

socialist ideas to the rural masses.

In 1975, a general election for an unicameral, fully elected parliament was held, after which a civilian government was installed. Meanwhile the communist triumph in Indochina, rapid American troop withdrawals from Thailand, and the abolition of the Laotian monarchy in 1976, had aroused enormous alarm amongst conservative Thai, particularly the military. The rightist groups, particularly the Village Scouts[96] (Luksua Chaoban), NAWAPOL[97] (New Forces) began to counteract the radical leftist movements. Importantly, NAWAPOL attracted a number of strong anti-communist monks, namely Kitthiwuttho who declared "Holy War" on the Communists by advocating that "killing communists is not demeritorious".[98]

As early as 1975, student activitists, leaders of peasants and labor unions, were subjected to intimidation and assassination. The media campaign over radio and television propagated the slogan "right kill left". The backlash culminated in October 1976, when Thanom had returned from exile to lead the life of Buddhist monk at Wat Bowonniwet (the birthplace of Thammayutnikai). Huge demonstrations began at Thammasat University and demonstrators were assaulted by police and rightwing fanatics, and hundreds of students were killed. The military took power once more; thousands of students, left intellectuals, writers, and politicians went underground, many of them seeking refuge eventually with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the jungles of the North, Northeast, and South.

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96 To counteract the farmers' organizations and to resist leftist activities at the village level, the Village Scouts which was modelled on the South Vietnamese "grass root" defence organization against communists, were set up throughout the country. The villagers were taught to resist radical elements and to mobilize peasant support. Their ideology involved the protection and upholding of the nation, religion, and monarchy (Suksamran: 1982, p. 79).

97 NAWAPOL was founded by a group of high-ranking military, leading businessmen, and high civilian bureaucrats. It advocated to nationalist unity and strong anti-communism. Of all the right-wing movement NAWAPOL was the most articulate, and best defined in its organization. The Ministry of Interior, through provincial governors, police chiefs, and district officers, provided NAWAPOL with facilities such as meeting places, transport, and accommodation. Government officials were permitted to join the meetings as they were government duties. Financial support came mainly from anti-communist businessmen. More important, NAWAPOL attracted a number of monks, namely Kitthiwuttho who was the most important and influential member (Suksamran: 1982, p. 81).

98 Suksamran: 1982, p. 149.

In 1978, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the Chinese assault on northern Vietnam affected the CPT which adhered to the Chinese position. Finally, a liberalization policy pursued by General Kriangsak Chamanan (who overthrew the extremist rightwing regime in 1977) -a policy which included virtual amnesty for all those willing to return from the jungle- led to a swelling stream of defections. By 1981, the majority of those who had fled in 1976 were back where they had come from. If the 1976 slogan was "all roads led to the jungle," the epitaph for the 1981 was "the jungle was broken."

Problems in the Development of Thai Sangha

As the process of modernization on the part of secular section continued, changes and improvements took place in both Mahanikai and Thammayutnikai so that at present the two sects do not differ substantially in any way from each other.[99] However, after a half century of social change and political instability, the Sangha had lost the intellectual leadership of Thai society, particularly in the modernized sector. Monks were retired from their role in public education, secular and non-secular education were separated though many public schools were in monastery compounds. The religious teaching of the young went to the hands of laymen and many of books on religious subjects were the product of lay pens.[100] The Thai youth educated through the modern education system were often alienated from their religious and cultural tradition. The monks were recruited from the underprivileged, nearly entirely from the peasant'sons.[101]

Strong centralization of the Sangha administration increased numerous internal problems within the Sangha themselves. Further, the attitude of strict traditionalism of the elite in the Sangha maintained the traditional system of monastic education initiated by Wachirayan in the past century. At the same time, a diminution of interest in higher Pali studies on the part of young monks and novices was accompanied by an increased interest in

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99 Ratjavoramuni, Phra, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress Press, 1984), p. 21.

100 Landon: 1968, p. 218.

101 Ratjavoramuni: 1984, p.108.

acquiring modern secular knowledge for secular ends.[102] Monks became less and less prominent in the religious field, particularly the Buddhist philosophy. Affording secular knowledge to novices and monks aggravated the chances of their disrobing upon completion of their education.[103] This was the crisis in monastic education of the Thai Sangha.

Simultaneously, more and more monks focused their attention on rituals and the building of monasteries; some have become involved in activities that were not usually considered religious. Monks who lived in large temples in the cities led their lives much attacted to worldly ways. This period also witnessed a remarkable prevalence of animistic and superstitious beliefs and practices, including faith healing and mediumistic practices. The Sangha itself had a strong tie with polity and, more and more reliant on the secular government, and lacked strong dynamic leadership.

Generally speaking, the Sangha was weak in its structure and practice. The progress and success of Thai Buddhism in the latter part of the modern period both regional and national levels was credited to private personalities and organizations or lay sectors.[104] Under such a condition it was not difficult to begin any new endeavour without opposition from the Sangha. In order to understand the lose of the prominent place of the Sangha in modern Thai society, a brief historical role of monks as intellectual leaders will be discussed.

For several centuries, education in Thailand was in the hands of the Sangha. Wherever the monks settled and established monasteries, they also established schools. The monastery not only taught Buddhist scriptures but also secular subjects such as traditional medical, law, language, fine art, astrology, construction, and the art of self-defence. Religious

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102 As Bunnag writes there is evidence that sons of provincial farmers enter the Sangha with the intention of obtaining as good an education as possible in the monastic schools and in the Buddhist Universities in Bangkok; an education which they realize will stand them in good stead when they return to lay life. Significantly, many of the high officials in civil service ministries in the capital were once monks who had completed Grade 8 or 9 of the Barian (Parian) course of studies, see Bunnag, Jane, *Buddhist Monks, Buddhist layman* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 46-47.

103 Tambiah: 1976, p. 200.

104 Ratjavoramuni: 1984, p. 115.

instruction as well as secular ones were given solely by the monks. The popular primary education was the sending of young boys to the monasteries to learn elementary dhamma, reading, writing, and arithmetic.

For higher education, it was also a Thai custom that every young man (at age around twenty) stay for a time in the monastery and acquire a religious training and secular knowledge. When after a period of months, years, or decades, a monk left the robe, he was not looked upon as a drop-out but is respected by society since entry into the monkhood was considered part of a man's education. The cleverest of them were allowed to pursue their studies till they were qualified to fill public positions and offices. They then disrobed, but many intelligent and talented monks remained in monasteries in order to become heads of temples, ecclesiastical office-holders, religious specialists and professional teachers.[105]

The monasteries not only produced a minority of literate specialists who serviced the country at large but equally important made accessible diverse kinds of secular knowledge to monks who spent a period of time in robes, which they were able to put to good use when they disrobed. The Buddhist monasteries were centers of learning and transmission of religious and cultural values. Monks were society's intellectual elite in secular matters as well as religious. They were more knowledgeable than laymen.

The history of the Sangha as an intellectual elite which contributed to the creation and transmission of both religious and secular values enhanced its prestige and the prosperity of Buddhism in Thai society. At the present time, society's progress in modern Thailand has eroded the Sangha's former roles, particularly in its "elitist" area.

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105 Watson: 1980, 70.

Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand

The second half of twentieth century is characterized as a dynamic period of Thai Buddhism. An unprecedented number of religious movements have arisen and developed both in size and influence paralleling rapid social change and a cultural "identity crisis" in Thai society. The various movements emerged both at regional and national levels, involving change in all major aspects, namely, doctrinal interpretations, monastic discipline (vinaya), strictly religious observance and meditation practice, the revival of forest monks, the growth of learning one's religion from books, the roles of laymen, the establishment of Buddhist communities, and the incorporation of high technology in the propagation of Buddhist messages. These movements can be seen as varying attempts to cope with the stress of cultural and religious disruption, value disorientation, and sought to restore the traditional Buddhism. Here I will discuss three of these major movements, namely, Thammakai, Santi Asoka, and Buddhadasa's movement. These three movements are examples of attempts to communicate and to answer the spiritual needs of the Thai people, particularly among the urban middle strata in the modern Thai context. Before undertaking this discussion, however, it is necessary to review the forest monk tradition in Thailand. Significantly, the above three movements which seek to make Buddhism more relevant to everyday life have been inspired by the tradition of forest monks. Indeed, it could be said that current religious movements constitute a sort of revival of the forest monk approach.

From the early days, the Buddhist tradition has been associated with renunciation of life as laymen and the pursuit of monastic training in the forest gardens or centers removed from towns and cities. In the Theravada tradition a distinction emerged between "town" monasteries in which the principle activity was study and teaching, and "forest" monasteries where monks persued the practice of meditation.[106] Traditionally, the village-and-town-

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106 Traditionally, in all the Theravada Buddhist countries, including Thailand, the order of monks (Sangha) has been divided into two kinds: the forest dwellers (arannavasin) and the town or village dwellers (gamavasin). The former are usually associated with the vocation of meditation (vipassanadhura) and practice (patipatti), and the latter with the vocation of books (ganthadhura) and learning (pariyatti). The two labels are entrenched and describe two stereotypes of monks: one contemplative, reclusive, and devote to meditation and ascetic

dewelling monks have been the core of the mainstream ecclesiastical establishment, while the forest monk orders have tended to be excluded from honors and privileges conferred by the establishment. Thus, the forest monk in Thailand do not participate in the monastic examinations and do not receive scholarly titles; indeed, they remain outside the Sangha's system of royal and administrative titles altogether.[107] In ideal terms the forest monk tradition has been perceived as being closer to the monastic environment of early Buddhism and, therefore, more authentic.[108] Theravada reform movements in the late 19th and early 20th century in Thailand included a revival of the forest monk tradition. At the present, a certain number of forest monks have established forest monasteries and combined medition practice with teaching and propagating Buddhism in different parts of the country. Meditation has become a lay as well as monastic practice of daily life, which traditionally was exclusively a monks' task. Significantly, this development has not precluded a movement to formulate an activist social ethic. In contrast, many forest monks in contemporary period are active in community development as well as help to solve particular social problems such as forest conservation. One such forest monk will be described in Chapter Seven.

Thammakai Movement

The Thammakai movement was initiated by two graduates in economics from Kasertsaat University (Bangkok), Chaiboon Suthipol and Phadet Pongsawat who indicated great interest in Buddhism and practiced meditation under the famous spiritual leaders Phra

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practices; the other living amidst the laity, engaged in doctrinal learning and teaching, practicing rites and ceremonies, and inhabiting architecturally substantial monasteries. See Tambiah, S.J., *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

107 The forest monks are referred to as Luang Pu, Luang Phau ("grand-father" and "father" respectively) and as Acharn (teacher), not as Chaokun or Phrakhru, names that signify the holding of official titles, (see Tambiah: 1984).

108 Historically, the Buddha meditated in the forest. When he attained enlightenment he then went to teach the dhamma. From the beginning, meditation and teaching have been the two sides of a single path, the dhamma.

The forest monk tradition has been examined in several studies od Theravada Buddhism. (See Tambiah: 1984). Carrithers, Michael, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). Hawley, John S., ed., *Saints and Virtues* (Berkely : University of California Press, 1987).

Mongkol Thepmuni, the deceased abbot of Wat Paknam Phasicharoen, Bangkok. Chaiboon was born in 1944 in Singburi province in the Central region of Thailand. His parents divorced when he was young, and he was brought up by his father, a well-off government official. Phadet was born in 1940 into a merchant family in the Central province of Kanchanaburi. After graduation in 1969, they were ordained at Wat Paknam, Chaiboon assuming the monastic name of Dhammajayo and Phadet the name of Dattajivo. Both young monks made a vow to revive Buddhism and in 1970, Wat Phra Thammakai (Thammakai Temple), a religious center of the Thammakai movement, was established in Pathum Thani province, about 30 kilometers north of Bangkok.

The Thammakai, Teachings and Practice

Wat Phra Thammakai is formally within Mahanikai but the monastery has established itself as a distinctive movement dedicated to the renewal of Thai Buddhism. The Thammakai temple is different from traditional temples as it was built for the purpose of both serving as a temple and a pilgrimage site (Tudunghastaan). The temple consists of a non-traditional stylised Thai chapel (boot) and other modern constructions emphasizing splendor, grandeur, cleanliness, and orderliness. It is situated in the forest garden on an area of 800 acres (2,000 rais). The Thammakai monks are expected to have a certain standard of secular education and a strong sense of religious commitment by making a vow to ordain for life.[109] Monks from outside the group are not permitted to take part in the monastic activities.

The central feature of the movement is a particular form of meditation practice, delivered from Phra Mongkol Thepmuni who claimed to be the first person rediscovering the Thammakai method, based on the visualisation of "bright gem" (duang kaew), located at the psychic centre of the body, which the meditator visually penetrates in order to realize on ever

109 Unlike the conventional Thai monastic order, the Thammakai monks are university educated. In the Sangha at large even monks who have attained high positions in the Sangha hierarchy have been educated through monastic system with varying degrees of training in Pali and traditional subjects of Buddhist studies, but have had very limited secular education. In contrast, most of Thammakai monks have dedicated their lives to the monastic life after graduation. This means that Thammakai monks are much better educated in secular subjects, but lack background in Pali and traditional Buddhist studies (Swearer, Fundamentalistic Movements in Thailand, draft).

subtler "gem" which exists in different layers (spiritual bodies). The most refined layer is the ninth body in the form of a pure white lotus-shaped Buddha image which leads into nibbana. The Thammakai instructor equated its practice with the normative teaching of the Buddha: the vision of "bright gem" was interpreted as the Dhamma, the first stage of realization, and the internal visualisation of the Buddha image in the middle-part of the body, corresponding to the entry of the Middle Path, it is what the Buddha refered to when he declared "those who see the Dhamma see me".

Thammakai's meditation practice is clearly explained. It offers members a simple formula for enlightenment available to everyone, maintaining that there is no other way to attain nibbana (nirvana) except this way. It is also promoted to help success in material life, pointing out that regular practice leads to improved memory and thinking ability, more success in business and studying. Advanced Thammakai meditators may visit past lives and other miraculous visions.[110]

At the same time, the message of Thammakai movement is prepared for the majority of people. It focuses largely on moral and ethical concerns, emphasizing the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, as well as providing strong encouragement for grandeur of rites, merit making and accumulated merit for this life and the next one. Thammakai, moreover, does not reject the traditional Buddhist cosmologies of multiple heavens and hells, legends of the Buddha's miracles and the stories of previous lives. On the contrary, it has elabolated them suitably to offer to its members.

The Thammakai's messages are not concerned with canonical texts and ignore complex philosophical discussions. Though all Thammakai monks including its leaders are well educated in the secular sense, they neither know Pali nor Pali scriptures. The movement, moreover, neither challenges the authority of the Sangha nor criticizes the socio-political order. In contrast it sought support from senior monks in the high Sangha hierarchy as well as royal family, important military and government figures.

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110 Zehner, Edwin, "Reform Symbolism of a Thai Middle-Class Sect: The Growth and Appeal of the Thammakai Movement." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21/2: 1990, p. 407.

Thammakai is the fastest growing religious movement in Thailand today. The Movement has expanded its influence and attracted people all over the country. In general it has a broad-based urban middle strata constituency. Although the Thammakai's teachings and practice are simplistic, the utilization of sophisticated, highly developed publications, and costly media campaigns make it successful in propagating its messages to the general public. One of the most important activities of the movement is the Student Ordination Program (Dhammadhayad) to train selected university students in summer vacation.[111] The program began in 1979 with 24 students and increased rapidly. In 1986, 1056 students from eighteen universities were ordained. The ideology of the movement is integrated with an intensive meditation experience. The total number of students trained within a period of seven years (1979-1986) reached 3354.[112] The Dhammadhayad program has become a functional substitute for the traditional three-month rainy season ordination. With a leadership educated in the secular university system and a considerable fund from the movement which continually supports the Student Buddhist Associations's activities on almost all Bangkok university campuses, these Student Buddhist Associations have became an integral part of the Thammmakai organization. They are directed at propagating the thought and activities of Thammakai movement.

Movement, Oraganization, and Leadership

Wat Phra Thammakai stands as the center of meditation practice and major Buddhist

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111 The Dhammadhayad Program is offered only for males between the ages 18-35. It is a two-months training: a one month intensive course in meditation and physical toughening, followed by a second month ordained as monks residing at the temple. Since it is a temporary ordination, therefore in most cases students return to college and university (Zhner: 1990, p. 410).

The Thammakai selected only university students for the Dhammadhayad program, and only those students who are regarded as having attained a high degree of proficiency in the Thammakai meditation system are ultimately accepted for ordination. Dhammadhayad (Dhamma-heir) practice is rigorous. Its major elements are strict observance of the eight precepts, living under the shade of an umbrella protected only mosquito net as practiced by thudong monks (forest monks), listening to sermons, and practicing meditation (Jackson: 1989, 212).

112 Matichon: No 321, June 1986, p. 13.

celebrations such as Visakha and Makha Puja (Buddha and Dhamma Days). Every Sunday thousands of devotees (3000-5000) in white dresses participate in religious rituals and sit in meditation in neat rows. The movement, capitalize on an increasingly popular form of Buddhist practice, often identified with the tradition of forest monk.[113] Thammakai is the first Thai temple to use white as the uniform of all its lay participants -men, women, children.[114] Prawet Wasi suggested that discipline, cleanliness, and orderliness are involved in the way of life of the middle class and the movement responds to such needs.[115]

The popularity of the Thammakai movement in the capital partly reflects a conservatism among a section of the urban middle class. It seems that the Thammakai movement attempts to restore the traditional ideals of Thai Buddhist identity. It has less in common with the religious reforms associated with King Mongkut and Wachirayan than with Buddhist-nationalist directions.

Thammakai movement is characterized by a strong authoritarian leadership centered around the two charismatic co-founders, Dhammajayo and Dattajivo who are the driving forces behind the rapid growth of the movement. The organization and activities of the movement are centralized, emphasizing obedience and discipline. Wat Phra Thammakai is a unique religious center of the movement with a network connected to over 50 provincial lay centers throughout the country, including control over 30 post-secondary institutions and University Buddhist Associations.

Thammakai Foundation is the center of the movement's administration and organization which are carried on by well-educated young devotees. Lay administrators receive a low salary. A monthly magazine, Kanlayanamit (Good Friend) was issued with 10,000 subscribers in 1985. Subsequently, a Thammakai newspaper was published which reported on the movement activities, Sangha news, and teaching articles. Thammakai's

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113 Swearer D.K., Fundamentalist Movement in Theravada Buddhism, (draft).

114 Zehner:1990, p. 417.

115 Prawese Wasi, *Suan Mokkh, Thammakai, Santi-Asoka* (Bangkok: Mor Chao Ban Press, 1987), p. 36.

posters, Dhamma tapes and books, leaflets, Thammakai bags, umbrellas, and saving boxes, notebooks and pencils, clothing for male and female meditators were sold and widely distributed.[116] Lay administered offices set time schedules to visit the provincial lay centers, dispensing information, organizing trips to Wat Phra Thammakai, and collecting funds.

According to the deputy abbot, Dattajivo, the Thammakai monastry needs considerable funds, at least fifteen million Baht (US$ 600,000) a month to maintain its overheads and most of income comes from donations.[117] The abbot, Dhammajayo compared his religion as goods, when they need selling, good management and marketery is needed. It is clearly evident that the well-to-do in the urban middle strata is the target group of the movement.

The movement also set out with the undisguised goal of making money and has invested in such ventures as pharmaceuticals, milk-powder, publishing and printing, hotel, land, tourism, and oil. It has been estimated that the total assets of the Thammakai temple complex, together with its related real estate businesses, amount to well over one billion baht (US$ 40 million).[118] The abbot, Dhammajayo has a number of luxury motor-vehicles for his personal use including a Rolls Royce.

Thammakai movement is criticized by many Buddhist scholars, namely Prawet Wasi, Satienpong Wannaphok, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, and Phra Thepwethi. They argue that Thammakai meditation practice is not the way of Buddhism and there is no canonical basis. Its message is essentially a "narrow Dhamma". The Thammakai is actually in the business of selling "religious pleasure", excessive affuence, and an emphasis on the grand, luxurious, and extravagent rites which totally deviate from the Buddhist tradition.[119]

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116 Satha-anan: 1990, p. 401.

117 Interview with Thammakai's monks and its menbers, Chiang Mai, 1988.
Taylor, J.L., "New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: An Individualistic Revolution, Reform and Practical Dissonance" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol.XXI, No.1 March 1990, p. 141.

118 Satha-anan: 1990, p. 402.

119 Ibid.,

Santi Asoka Movement

The Santi Asoka movement can be seen as the exact opposite of Wat Phra Thammakai. While the Thammakai movement is high-tech, high-capital and enjoys a considerable support from the Sangha, the Santi Asoka Buddhist group advocates a radically simple way of life and has declared itself independent of the national Sangha hierarchy. Santi Asoka receive donations only from "believers".[120] The monastic centres of Santi Asoka are simple, austere places devoid of the grandeur and comfortable affuence of Wat Phra Thammakai. Whereas Thammakai emphasizes meditation practice, Santi Asoka denies any form of concentrated meditation because the everyday routine in daily life is the "dhamma practice" itself. Unlike Thammakai which has fashioned a fundamentalistic, "moral majority" type ethos for the Thai Buddhist mainstream, the Santi Asoka has designed a sectarianism for the few.[121]

Leadership, Teaching, and Practice

Phra Bodhirak, the founder of the Santi Asoka movement, was born in the Northeast province of Srisaket in 1935 into a merchant family. After finishing secondary school, he went to study fine arts in Bangkok, living in poverty and had to do odd jobs to support himself. He then worked as a television producer and song writer, making a great deal money and living luxuriously. At age 36, the peak of his careeer, he made an abrupt change: gave up everything and got himself ordained as a monk in Thammayutnikai at Wat Asokaram in Samut Prakarn, 20 kilometres south of Bangkok.

Phra Bodhirak engaged in heated discussions about the dhamma rather than spending time performing traditional monastic chants and Pali study. He gained followers both monks and laymen from his temple and other temples of Mahanikai, referring to his followers as "the

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120 Outsiders who interested in merit making have to go to Santi Asoka monastic centre at least seven times before their donations are accepted (From the author's experience and interview with a follower of the movement at Buddhasathan Santi Asoka, Bangkok, 1988).

121 Swearer, Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism (draft).

Asoka group". They established a monastic centre called Dan Asoka (Asoka's Land) outside of Nakorn Phathom, 50 kilometres west of Bangkok, where monks and laymen, both Thammayutnikai and Mahanikai could stay and practice the dhamma together. The project did not meet with the approval of his Thammayut preceptor (Upatcha).

Phra Bodhirak was then reordained in Mahanikai in 1973. Two years later (1975), he was investigated for proclaiming himself "ariya" (Buddhist saint). Such a claim is a serious breach of the monastic discipline (vinaya). Bodhirak resigned from Mahanikai and has ever since remained "independent" from the Thai Sangha.

Santi Asoka monastic centre was established in Bangkok in 1976 and spread to four provinces: Nakhon Swan in the central region, Nakhon Pathom nearby Bangkok, Srisaket and Nakhon Ratchasima in the Northeast. As a sect, Santi Asoka emphasizes several minor differences in practice from the Buddhist mainstream. Their monasteries which are called Buddhasathana (Buddha place) have no chapel (boot), pavilion, Buddha image, no performance of any traditional rites and pali chanting even merit-making. It was built for the purpose of both a place of religious practice and a lay monastic residence. Santi Asoka also established its own ordination lineage. Legitimacy of the movement rest on its claim to strictly perform the monastic discipline (vinaya) compared with the majority of Thai monks.

Moreover, Santi Asoka's monks follow additional disciplinary rules such as ordination for life, not shaving eyebrows (following Sinhalese tradition), wear the brownish red robes, go barefoot, and not use umbrella which is associated with the forest monk tradition rather than town-dwelling monks. Women are accepted to be ordained as female novices. Those who would be ordained in the sect have to pass the strict phase of practice under the observation of the group at least two years for monkhood and novice, and three years for becoming a female novice. These are not ordinary Thai Buddhist practice.

The central feature of the movement is its adherence to a strict Buddhist precept (sila), particularly vegetarianism. Its message is simplistic, moralistic, and it is associated with broader social concerns, for instance, they teach that poverty, crime, and social injustice occur

because people have neglected strict observance of Buddhist moral code (5 and 8 precepts). [122] Santi Asoka also stands against city habits such as dress, dancing, smoking, drinking, and seeks to return to rural life. Its message offers nothing new but it has extended beyond standards of personal and social behavior. Santi Asoka lay followers focus their devotion on the performance of the Buddhist precepts (5 or 8 sila) -as part of the preparation to mindfulness and wisdom. They, moreover, become vegetarians, give up all addictive substances and liquid consumption other than water, abstain from various pursuits of pleasure ranging from cinema to television, eat only once a day, wear blue Thai peasants shirts and pants, and wear short hair and go barefoot. Their goal is to lead an exemplary life in matters of personal piety and the efforts of the group are concentrated on bringing this way of life to the attention of other and helping them follow it.

The movement, moreover, emphasizes communual activities and joint decision-making which absorbs the individual in the group. They refer to themselves collectively as a "Dhamma Family" (yadthi-tham). But at the same time within the movement there are hierarchical structures or "leveling", measured by a distinctive moral training and spiritual seriousness.[123] Furthmore, becoming a follower of the movement is conditional upon passing tests set by the movement. It seems that the movement offers a new identity and a stable meaning for life as well as a set of simple answers to personal and social problems.

The Santi Asoka movement itself claims to seek a return to the pristine teaching and

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122 Five and eight Buddhist precepts are: prohibition against killing, stealing or taking what is not given, adultery, telling lies, consumption of intoxicants, abstention from untimely eating (after midday), from entertainment, visiting unseemly shows and from adorning oneself with ornaments, from using high and luxurious couches or beds (Interview with Santi Asoka's members, Bangkok, 1988).

123 For example male and female lay followers may perform five and eight precepts, male and female novices follow 10 precept, and monk follow 227 rules (vinaya).

represent the central tenets of Buddhism. It strongly criticizes conventional Thai Buddhist practice for its superficiality, supernatural belief and metaphysical interpretation of Buddhist teaching. Buddhism, argues Bodhirak, has nothing to do with superstitions, magical ritures, merit making, even Buddha image. The majority of Thai Buddhists both monk and layman practice their faith as something into which they are born or ordained by custom, they do not strive to realize the highest moral and spiritual ideals of Buddhism.

Bodhirak also rejects meditation practice, saying that it is not the right way; to be a Buddhist is to be one who acts in the world for the benefit of the world. Santi Asoka followers are encouraged to consistly apply "moral restraint" in everyday life. In some extent, Santi Asoka is inspired by Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism. However, it tends to support a less religious rationalism than those Buddhadasa. The movement regards traditional notion of rebirth in terms of reincarnation and the extraordinary ability of its leader is accepted. Bodhirak himself still maintain that he is an ariya (Buddhist saint); he emphasizes his spiritual attainment as being the basis of his religious authority to justify Buddhist teaching. He said that he had never studied the Tipitaka or any Buddhist scriptures; his knowledge in dhamma is acquired through revelatory experience which came from his spiritual ability in the previous life.[124]

Movement and Politics

An interesting aspect of Santi Asoka's development is its Buddhist community which Sombat calls Buddhist utopia. At Nakhon Pathom 19 monks, 7 female novices, and about 70 lay families live together and lead a simple way of life.[125] They established a self-sufficient community, producing for consumption, and sharing labor; residents work in the rice fields, plant vegetables, fruit trees, and herb gardens; they mill their rice by hand, weave their cloth, built their own community, religious hall, houses, roads, and water system; no electricity is

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124 Bodhirak, *Satja heng Chewit kong Pothirak* [The Life Truth of Bodhirak] (Bangkok: Teera-karnpim), 1983, p. 260.

125 For more details see Sombat Chantawong, *Chum-chon Pathom Asoka: Phutta-Utopia* [Pathom Asoka Community: A study of Buddhist Utopia] (Bangkok, Thammasanti Foundation, 1988).

allowed. Asokan community reflects the ideal Buddhist community, emphasizing simplicity and naturalness, simultaneously, challenging consumerism and the appropriation of Western capitalistic materialism.

Like Thammakai, the Santi Asoka movement is characterized by a strong centralization around its charismatic leader, Phra Bodhirak. Several organizations were established under the rubric of the movement. The Thammasanti Foundation (1977) handles the hundreds of the movement's publications. The Kongtaptham Mulanithi (Army of Dhamma Foundation) was set up in 1981 to support the activities of the movement, the Chomlom Mangsawerat heng Prathetthai (Vegetarian Association of Thailand) and the Samakhom Phupatibattham (Dhamma Practitioners Association) with over 10,000 members was found in 1984. This number seems to be the core member of the movement. In 1988, the movement has 80 monks, 18 female novices and the number of those involved in the movement roughly estimated to be 100,000.[126] The financial sources of the movement mostly come from donations of the followers themselves.

The Santi Asoka movement grows at a moderate rate. It is rather small compared with the Thammakai movement, but the dedication of its followers is more significant. The followers of the movement are mainly from the lesser educated sections of the urban and provincial middle and lower class.[127] The movement, however, has a number of professional supporters, the most prominent of whom is the present governor of Bangkok and the leader of Palangtham (Dhamma Force) Party, General Chamlong Srimuang who has brought Santi Asoka to prominence since 1981 through his political activities.

Chamlong's ascetic Buddhist life-style and his strong moral political stance has attracted the middle class residents of Bangkok. He symbolizes not only personal discipline, integrity, and sincerity but also as a "clean" politician. Followers of Santi Asoka were advised to support Chamlong as religion and politics are considered by Bodhirak as indivisible. In 1985, he won the election for the position of governor of Bangkok with almost half a million

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126 Interview with Phra Bodhirak at Buddhasathana Santi Asoka, Bangkok, 1988.

127 Ibid.

votes, double the vote of his nearest rival.

Chamlong insists the need for religious influence in politics, refering to Buddhadasa's book Dhamma and Politics (Thamma Kap Karnmuang) that "if politics do not consist of dhamma (morality) politics will become a means of destroying the world".[128] He also promotes the ideals of self sacrifice, dedication to duty, and concern for the poor. The link between the Palangtham Party and Santi Asoka movement is obvious. Most of the Party's executive committee and half of those who contested the poll up-country known followers of Santi Asoka. Moreover, the ideology of the Palangtham Party reflects the ideals of the Santi Asoka movement.

The Santi Asoka movement has been widely criticized by Buddhist scholars and many social critics, namely Phra Sophonkhanaporn (Thammayutnikai), Phra Thepwethi, Anan Sanakan, and the Parian Tham Samakhom (Pali Study Association). They criticized that Santi Asoka's teachings are subjective, too superficial, and lack an understanding of Pali or of the scriptures. Bodhirak claims to attain the highest spiritual state and to base his interpretations in these experience, a form of behavior rejected in the Pali Canon. Bodhirak's attack on the Thai Sangha and laity are too extreme which is not the way of Buddhist monks. Finally, some argue that Santi Asoka was illegal, and that Bodhirak violates the dhamma-vinaya (Buddhist teaching and the monastic discipline) and the Sangha Act for illegally ordaining his followers. Bodhirak resigned from the Thai Sangha while he maintains his status as a monk. Traditionally, nullification of membership of the Sangha means to disrobe.

Buddhadasa Movement

The Buddhadasa movement is one of the most prominent religious movements in contemporary Thailand. It was formed in 1932, the year in which the absolute monarchy was replaced by constitutional monarchy. The contral feature of the movement lies in the reinterpretation of Pali Canon by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Buddhadasa interprets the Theravada doctrine intellectually and critically. His interpretation attracted a large number of intellectual

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128 Jackson: 1989, p.184.

sectors. It is held that Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism reflects not only the potential of traditional religious culture to accommodate to modern life but also impels Buddhism toward modernization. Buddhadasa's movement which forms the central focus of this thesis, will be discussed in detail on subsequent Chapter.

Buddhadasa was born into a local Thai-Chinese merchant family in 1906 in Chaiya, the southern Thai province of Surat Thani. At age of 20, he was ordained as a monk into Mahanikai Order in his home-town. Like other young monks he studied Nak tham (Dhamma study, a monastic educational system initiated by Prince Wachirayan) and spent a couple of years in Bangkok, studying for a Pali ecclesiastical degree. He was deeply disappointed with what he regarded as the lack of insight into the Buddha's teachings among Bangkok monks. He returned to Chaiya in 1932, spent the following two years alone in the forest, being his own "master", practiced meditation and studied the Tipitaka. His forest dwelling was given a name that became known until today as Suan Mokkh (the Garden of Liberation).

In 1934, Buddhadasa began to promote the dhamma. The Dhammadana Foundation was set up by his younger brother to support the activities of Suan Mokkh, the quarterly journal Buddhasasana was issued to disseminated Buddhadasa's reinterpretation of Theravada doctrine. For Buddhadasa, the crisis and confusion between Buddhism and popular belief is rooted in the problem of religious language. He has developed a distinctive and innovative approach to the interpretation of Buddhism which leads him to become antithetical to the normative symbol system of Theravada Buddhism.

Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism is significant. It can be seen as an attempt to make Buddhist teaching relevant to a layman's life in this world. Buddhism is interpreted as a way of life rather than "teaching". The highest ideal of Buddhism, nibbana is the state that everyone can attain whenever his mind is free from selfishness. It is a part of understanding and practice of the Buddhist populace at large. Nibbana is the goal of human being, not just Buddhists or monks. Buddhadasa also strongly criticizes popular Thai Buddhist belief and practice among both monks and laymen. He contends that many of the later developments within Buddhism are extreneous and sometime antithetical to the genuine teachings of

Buddha, even in the Pali Canon. His teachings won the support of urban middle class and intellectuals. Many groups and organizations invited him to give sermons. His lectures and sermons are recorded and published by his followers. Buddhadasa was the first monk in this country who came out of the temple to speak to the public in ordinary "language".[129] He has produced a number of books and articles more than any other Buddhist scholars in Thai history. Many Buddhadasa's books are translated into other languages.

Suan Mokkh, the forest monastic centre, was located on 150 acre of forest garden, five kilometers outside of Chaiya. It illustrates Buddhadasa's ideal of propagating Buddhism in a form integrating both early and modern forms. Unlike most of Thai monasteries, Suan Mokkh has no elaborately decorated temple. Individual dwelling places for over seventy monks set in the midst of a forest, their chapel is the top of a hill with trees as pillars and a canopy of leafy branches as a roof. Two main buildings have been constructed as a library and a "spiritual theater" for the teaching of Buddhism through the use of audio-visuals such as films, slides, and paintings which will engage the attention of people of all ages. Unlike the average Thai monk who does not engage in physical labor beyond the maintenace of his own quarters, the monks of Suan Mokkh spend part of everyday working: construction of new buildings, roads, producing the teaching media, numerous artistic projects of the centre, and teaching the dhamma.

The Buddhadasa movement generated and developed within the Thai Sangha. Though Buddhadasa criticizes popular Buddhism but has never rejected the authority of the Sangha as has Bodhirak, the founder of Santi Asoka. Though Buddhadasa's interpretation, remarks Swearer, is somewhat unorthodox, they are informed by a broadmindness which contrasts with Santi Asoka's relatively simplistic and moralistic ideology.[130] The movement emphasizes attaining the teaching of Buddha rather than relying on superficial appearance and details of monastic discipline (vinaya). It also shows little interest in bringing about structural reform within the Sangha, neither in building up an effective organization nor a special system

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129 Phongphit Seri, *Religion in a Changing Society* (Hong Kong: ARENA PRESS, 1988), p. 9.

130 Swearer, Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism (draft).

for itself. Suan Mokkh does not function as an administrative headquarters with branch offices. Buddhadasa plays the role of being inspirator rather than the charismatic leader. The movement is interested more in gaining listeners than in followers, and is content to inspire rather than govern. There are neither criteria nor a set of tests for distinguishing those who are acceptable for membership from those who are not. In these characteristics, Buddhadasa's movement differs from Mongkut's reform, including Thammakai and Santi Asoka movements.

Chapter 3

Life History of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

Data on the life history of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu came from a biography based on interviews with him.[1] Other data came from Buddhadasa's letters, his recollections and biographies put together by his followers. These books are not hagiographies. None allude to charismatic characteristics nor claim miraculous actions by him as is common in biographies of other Thai monks. The life of a founder of an important religious movement has an intrinsic interest. How did the interpretative ideas of Buddhadasa form. My main interest in Buddhadasa's life history is to examine how his early life and socio-cultural environment constituted the basis and the matrix of his religious thought.[2]

Family, Childhood and Education

The Important Family Members

Sieng Panitch, Buddhadasa's father, was a Chinese merchant. He was born in 1871 at Phumrieng in Chaiya District of the southern Thai province of Surat Thani, 650 kilometers south of Bangkok. He was the eldest of three sons. His ancestors were Hokkien Chinese and were glass-painters.[3] They had moved to Phumrieng so long ago that they had become natives of Phumrieng.[4] As a child Sieng was a monastic boy and studied at a temple school.

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1 *Lao Vai Mua Waisoantaya* [Recollection in the Twilight Years], based on Pasananadahammo Bhikkhu's interviews of Buddhadasa is written in question and answer form so that the original statements are preserved. Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu, a young progressive monk and follower of Buddhadasa recounted that he had begged Buddhadasa many times to compile his autobiography so others could learn from his experiences. But he refused, saying an autobiography is inappropriate in the Buddhist tradition because it encouraged self-pride. Only when Buddhadasa was 78 years old (1984) did he agreed to recount his life.

2 The methodology of life history analysis of Buddhadasa, see Bertaux, Daniel, ed., *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Science*. (California: Sage Publication Ltd., 1981).

3 During 19th century there were many Chinese imigrants to Thailand. Most of them settled in the South and the Central of Thailand. They were artisans and traders. There was inter-cultural integration between Chineses and Thais, for instance, by marriage. For more details see Skinner, G. William, *Chinese Society in Thailand*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1957.

4 Buddhadasa recalled that the original Chinese last name of his paternal great grandfather was Ka but later, an official changed it to Panitch (meaning merchant) because Nguam's father was a merchant and owned the only shop in the locality at that time see Pasanandhammo Bhikkhu, *Lau-wai Mua Wai-soantaya* [Recollection in the Twiligh Years Vol.1-3] (Bangkok: Komolkeemthong

He was also once ordained as a Buddhist monk.[5] He spoke very little Chinese. Sieng married a Thai official's daughter, Klaun Panitch. He owned his grocery shop at Phumrieng and maintained his interest in Buddhist teachings althrough he did not engage so much in rituals and merit-making. He did not take up drinking, smoking or gambling and did not believe in some local superstitions and therefore there was no spirit house in his own house. Sieng died quite early in 1923 when Buddhadasa was seventeen years old.

Kluan Panitch, Buddhadasa's mother, was born in 1883 at Ta Chaang district nearby Phumrieng. Her grandparents were Thais and were farmers who had been living at Ta Chaang district for a long time. Her father was a district official of Ta Chaang. Klaun was one of the five children and was the only one who married a Chinese. There were many Chinese in the South and inter-marriage between Thais and Chinese was usual for people in that region at time.[6]

Kluan's ancestors were devoted Buddhists, meditating even at home. She had had an intimate familiarity with Buddhism since childhood and was a very devout Buddhist. When she married she moved to Phumrieng to live with her husband who was a grocer. She carried out the Buddhist religious rituals, went to merit-making every Buddhist sabbath day and received instructions. Klaun's religious beliefs seem to have made a profound impression on her growing children, she later played an important role in the proliferation of her own sons' work. She died in 1947 when Buddhadasa's movement began to develop.

Yee-Guey Panitch, Buddhadasa's younger brother, is one of the most important family member who was a significant advocate in spreading Buddhism and founding Buddhadasa's movement. He was born in 1908. Like his father he was a monastic boy and studied at a temple school. After his secondary school, he studied pre-medicine at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok from 1925 to 1926. During this time he was impressed

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Foundation, 1985), p. 4.

5 Sieng's father was Chinese and interested in Buddhism. He had many dhamma books of his own to read. His mother was Chinese-Thai and was earnest about merit-making.

6 Interview with Dhammadasa in 1988, at Chaiya.

by articles he read from the University newspaper and the Japanese magazine "Young East" about the Buddhist revival taking place in other countries. Of special interest was Anagarika Dhammapala, the Singhalese man trying to revive the Buddhism in both Sri Lanka, India as well as the propagation of Buddhism in Western countries by Anagarika Dhammapala.[7] In 1927, he returned to Phumrieng for a visit but stayed on instead of pursuing his medical studies. One reason was to enable his elder brother, Buddhadasa to continue his monkhood without any worries about business and family. He married a Thai farmer's daughter in 1932. They lived with his mother in Phumrieng.

Yee-Guey was not ordained, but remained interested in religious problems. He translated and wrote articles on Buddhism for popular journals at that time, using the pen name of Dhammadasa. Finally, he changed his name to Dhammadasa (which means The Servant of Dhamma) in 1932. In 1933, he published a quarterly journal, Buddhasasana, in order to spead Buddhism and still continues publishing until today. After the death of his mother, he took over the family shop and left the responsibility of running the business to his wife. Most of his time was devoted to the work of the movement such as financial arrangements, publishing the journal and organizing activities of the movement in his community. At present he is still active in spreading Buddhism.

Siang Panitch, Buddhadasa's younger uncle, was the other family member who influenced Buddhadasa. Siang was born in 1876. He was ordained at the age of 20 and studied at Wat Patumkrongkra in Bangkok for 10 years and could read the ancient Pali manuscripts.[8] He was an adaptive and inquistive person, more interested in study and had better opportunities than Buddhadasa's father who had never been to Bangkok at all. He

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7 Anagarika means one who enters the homeless life without formally entering the Sangha. Anagarika Dhammapala (1864-1933) was a leader of a Buddhist movement in Sri Lanka, which was founded at the end of the nineteenth century. This movement was not only in with the line revival Buddhism in Sri Lanka and India, but also propagated Buddhism in the West. Dhammapala set up the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891 and later (1892) began publishing the Maha Bodhi journal which soon became a powerful vehicle for the dissemination of Buddhism (Gokhale, Balkrishna Govind, "Anagarika Dharmapala" in *Contributions to Asia Studies* Vol. 4, Bardwell L. Smith, ed., 1973), pp. 30-33.

8 Because Siang resided at Wat Patumkongka, many monks from Phumrieng and Chiya including Buddhadasa studied there.

usually sent some magazines and letters relating to the happenings in Bangkok to his nephew (Buddhadasa). After disrobing, Siang married a Chinese-Thai merchant's daughter and moved to live with his wife at Chumporn, the southern province of Thailand. There, he was a clerk in a bird's nest factory.

Siang played an important role in stimulating Buddhadasa to study Pali scripture at Bangkok in order to be able to read the original Pali Text. Siang often wrote letters to Buddhadasa relating to the point that he agreed with Buddhadasa's ideas of Buddhist interpretation. He died in 1951 when Buddhadasa's movement had spread to many regions of Thailand.

Childhood and Education

Buddhadasa (1906-) was originally named Nguam Panitch. He was born on May 27, 1906 in a small merchant family at Phumrieng, a small town on the eastern coast of the southern Thai province of Surat Thani where his Chinese father and Thai mother owned a general shop.[9] He is the eldest of three children of Sieng and Klaun Paitch. His younger brother is Yee-Guey or Dhammadasa (1908-), who later became a significant advocate of spreading Buddhism. The youngest sister of Nguam, Kim-Soy (1911-1989) married a Chinese merchant's son and moved to Ban Don, the central district of Surat Thani.[10] There is no evidence that she had any important role in the proliferation of her brother's work.

Nguam's father often travelled on business to buy goods for his shop which was the

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9 Phumrieng, about 70 years ago, was a small town located on the eastern coast of southern Thai province of Surat Thani. People of Phumrieng mostly made their living from fishing and rice farming. Fishing was done at the domestic level, surpluses were traded and the standard of living for most residents was moderate. Those who were considered affluent were the ones who owned several rice fields. Even the affluent were not much different from poorer villagers. It was the officials who had much higher status. The relationship between people and the officials was hierarchical. The people felt they existed at different levels, but these levels were not in conflict. The people were earnest in merit-making. The religious influence on the people was profound; their lives and the monastery were inseparable (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 40).

10 Dhammadasa recounted that his original name, Yee-Guey and his sister's name, Soy or Kim-Soy were not Chinese names but ancient Thai names. They were given by the senior monk in Phumrieng (Interview with Dhammadasa at Chaiya in 1988).

only one in Phumrieng at that time.[11] His mother took responsibility for the shop as a shop-keeper. Nguam's early childhood (1906-1913) was thus spent with his mother. As the elderest son, he was expected to inherit, thus his youth was engaged in work on family's shop quite early. The mother was strict with her children, especially thriftiness and usually cautioning them to do their best at work.[12] They were not allowed to fish or to kill every kind of animal even to sing popular songs because she believed that they were degrading. Nguam was trained in a line of Buddhism which affected his personality very deeply. However, his early childhood seems not to have differed much from other Thai children of that time.[13]

From 1914 to 1917 Nguam was sent to receive a basic education at Wat Mai, a temple boarding school providing a new independence and pleasant environment for Thai boys. In traditional Thai society, temples were the core of the Thai educational system for many centuries. Most of Thai boys were sent to study at the temple for two or three years. There, they learned how to read, to write and studied religious traditions as well as Thai culture. They gained more skill and experience in how Thai boys adjusted themselves to the outside world beyond their families. As a boy, Nguam learned how to read, to write and was trained in living with others; he learned group restrictions and responsibilities. Such opportunities and training traditionally could be found only in temples.

It was traditional in Thai society for a Thai boy to stay in a temple. The educated monks would take care of them by providing them with food and lodging, teaching them eating discipline, giving them an education, and training them in religious tradition and some other activities such as serving a monk, cleaning the temple, fetching water, gardening, making bamboo utensils, etc. Rice was obtained from monks' going on alms rounds and

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11 For a study of business practises among Chinese imigrant in rural areas see Auansakul, Punnee *The Development of the Domestic Rice Trade in Central Region Thailand 1800-1938*. (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bielefeld University, 1990).

12 Buddhadasa said that if asked how his mother influenced him, he would immediately answer that it was the thriftiness not only vis a vis expenses, but also with water and firewood. All things were to be used just enought for need and never wasted. Everything was to be done thriftily as possible, even the use of time. Somethings were saved unnecessarily, but she did so only to show that they could be saved. His father, a Chinese merchant, was, on the other hand, rather easy-going on this point (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p.7).

13 Interview with Dhammadasa at Chaiya in 1988.

condiments from households which provided daily supplies. The boys learned how to read and write in the morning and afternoon. Thai boxing, a means of self-defense, was taught in the evenings. After evening chanting, activities are arranged to train the children to be clever, witty, logical, wary, and observant. Both the novices and the temple boys gathered together to discuss such topics as cooking rice. A volunteer would describe how to do it, while others listened and objected when he made a mistake. They enjoyed this very much. If too many objections arose, others would take over. The discussion went on until it was described so perfectly that nobody could make any objections.

The parents were gratified that their children get in to a temple because the children could work at gardening, make bamboo utensils, prepare herbal medicines, and so on. If the parents did not need the children to help them at home, the children continued living in the temple until they were ordained as novices and monks. Each local temple would have about twenty to thirty monks (for instance, there were five temples in Phumrieng). After ordination, they traditionally stayed at the temple about three or four years for studied Buddhist Texts, Thai literatures, and leading the traditional rituals, after which they disrobed and came out to start families.[14]

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14 Pasanandhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, pp. 38-41.

The Thais, like other Theravada Buddhist people in Southeast Asia, adopted the ideal that every male should spend a period of time as a member of Buddhist order. This ideal was realized by a boy becoming a novice and a man, at age twenty was ordained as monk. When a man entered the monkhood in Thai Buddhism, he did not, as in Catholicism, necessarity commit himself to remain in the religious order for life. Most of them return to lay life but only some of them remained permanently in Buddhist Sangha.

By this tradition, a degree of literacy obtained among males in Thai society was high. In

seventeenth century, visitors from France to Ayutthaya (an old capital of Thailand between 1467-1867) were impressed by the greater degree of literacy in Thailand than in France of that time, see Keyes, Charles F. Thailand. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), p. 36.

In 1918, at age twelve, Nguam went to a formal elementary school at Wat Nau and at the end of 1921 he transfered to study at Sarapi Uthit school in Chaiya, six kilometers away from Phumrieng. Both schools introduced a new form of Western educational system. Nguam received formal education from these two. He had moderate success in his studies but did not enjoy them, due to the fact that the schools demanded full time study and so many regulations. However, during that time (1921-1923) Nguam stayed with his father who had opened another shop in Chaiya because the new main transportation route ran through this town. As the transportation improved the trading activities and networks in Chaiya developed and it became a central district of Surat Thani at that time. Nguam was close to his father, he helped him in the business and learned from him. His father's habit of spending leisure time writing poetry impressed Nguam immensely. Later, he too, wrote poems.[15]

The new environment of Chaiya, quite different from that of Phumrieng, later inspired him to study and to write the history of archaeology of this town. Chaiya has many temples, with relics dating from the time of the Sri Vijaya Kingdom in the eighth century A.D. Religious tenets maintains itself among the ordinary people. It were ingrained through folk tales and children's lullabies known throughout southern Thailand. Historically, Chaiya was also a renowned center for Buddhist study.

In 1923, when Nguam was seventeen, his father died. He had to leave school during his senior year. The shop in Chaiya was closed and he moved to Phumrieng. Thus Nguam took over responsibility as head of the family when he was only 17 years old. His time was spent wholly in business and housework. He never had a chance to take any pleasure trips except when visiting his mother's relatives at Ta Chaang two or three times a year. However, since the shop was the only one in Phumrieng which was a place where people regularly met, talked and exchanged the wide ranging information both inside and outside of the community. Through this business Nguam met many people. He had a good relationship with other residents, namely, farmers, fishmen and the officials who were well educated, exchanging ideas informations and conversation. This led him to develop the habit of discussing and

15 Buddhadasa is famous for being competent in expressing the dhamma poetically and profoundly. His former ecclesiastical title, "Rajja Jaya Kavi", means a genius in poetry (Interview with Panyananda Bhikkhu, a close friend of Buddhadasa, at Wat Chonprathan in 1988).

expressing ideas independently.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the impact of King Rama V's Reforms were being felt in various parts of the country. The reforms included an introduction of formal education, expansion of capitalism, enlargement of transportation, utilization of modern technology and freedom in expressing ideas about the government system. This led to conflicts of different political and social ideologies which were expressed through the expansion of mass media in the reign of King Rama VI. Moreover, there was a propagation of modern nationalism for which King Rama VI was the pacemaker. He played a major part in rousing the Thai people to think of national goals through poetry, dramas, articles, etc. Many of the King's articles influenced the Thai people's thoughts profoundly. "The Jew of the East", an article he published in 1914, compared the Jew to the Chinese. It caused apprehension and distrust between the Thai and the Chinese, the latter having had problems with previous Thai governments.

Changes took place in Phumrieng through influences from the capital, Bangkok. By 1910, Phumrieng had been the site of the District headquarters. The government officials and their families came from Bangkok and lived in Phumrieng. This resulted in the local people's being culturally influenced more rapidly than other districts. The harmony of Phumrieng was gradually altered. Islam also expanded through Surat Thani by migration and became stronger. Nguam knew about the developments that took place in the country. He received letters and magazines from his uncle Siang, a monk in Bangkok. He read the books of progressive and socially critical Thai intellectual writers of that time, such as Tienwaan and K.R.S Kurab. Due to the fact that the shop also sold books, he had the opportunity to do a lot of reading. He read all kinds of books available in the shop such as children's books, humor books, traditional dhamma books and Western historical and novels.

Early Interest in Buddhism

How did Nguam first become interested in Buddhism? His original interest was arroused by his mother, who was an earnest believer of Buddhism. There were usually both

monks and the mother's friends visited the shop to talk and discuss religious topics, particularly the existence of heaven and hell, the effects of doing good and evil and observing the precepts. At these discussions Nguam was reported to gradually began to wonder why, if all such things were unreal, so many people had adhered to them for thousands of years.[16] At that time (1925) the Buddhist circle in Phumrieng was highly intrigued by the newly introduced educational curriculum for the clergy.[17]

It was a result of King Chulalongkorn's Reform of Sangha educational system. A number of monks and novices from Phumrieng and nearby districts enrolled for study. The family shop was transformed into a forum for dhamma discussions by five or six interested lay people. Nguam was attracted by the discussions as they were a new topic. He bought and studied the official dhamma books for the three-year curriculum, together with an Abhidhamma, a highly venerated literature of orthodox Buddhism.[18] He then understood the dhamma better and began eagerly participating in the discussions. He reserched and gathered things in order to talk and debate. He was the only young person in the group at age of nineteen, but was soon accepted as the group's teacher because of his clearer explanations with specific references to his readings. It was a new thing, different than these they had heard before.

The interest of this group grew and they came around and talked more frequently. The discussions were mainly on the meaning of the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, merit-making, and most popular of all, traditional beliefs in life after death, heaven and hell. Nguam disagreed with all these beliefs. Undoubtedly, he was particularly influenced by his readings of the official curriculum dhamma books of Vajirayana. Apparently, he was exposed

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16 Chit Pibanlthan, *Chivit lae Ngan khong Buddhadasa* [Life and Work of Buddhadasa Bhikku], (Bangkok: Kasembanakij, 1971), p.15.

17 More details see Chapter 2.

18 These text books were composed of Nawakowat (meaning the teaching for the newly ordained monks), which comprised three sections: Vinaya Banyat, a translation into Thai of the 227 precepts of monks; Thammawiphak, an arrangement of Thai translations of important passages of the Tipitaka which present the basic doctrines in enumerative catagories; Khihipatibat, an exposition of the right way of the monks to live. Phutthasatsanasuphasit vol.1-3 (Selected Buddhist proverbs), is, in effect, an amplification of Thammawiphak, containing a selection of important passages from the original Pali Texts with a Thai translation alongside the Text. Phutthaprawat vol.1-3 (The life

to the new trends of Buddhist teachings from an early age.

During 1924 to 1926 Nguam was involved in commerce and in discussing the dhamma. As his business improved, the consideration and the value he placed on religion also increased. His good basic education from six classes of the school, business experience, skills in free expression of opinion and debate, and the local atmosphere of Buddhist study at that time, constituted the breeding ground for his critical interest in questions, and in his search for answers. Although his background was business oriented he engaged in Buddhism before entered the monk at age of twenty. It may well be said that Nguam's path to monkhood had been pre-ordained.

Early Life as Buddhist Monk

Like other Thai men, upon reaching the age of 20, Nguam wanted to enter the monkhood. He intended to be a monk for only one pansa (Buddhist Lent), covering three months and then return to his business. He was ordained on July 29, 1926 into the Mahanikaya Order at Wat Nok. Afterwards, however, he went to stay at Wat Mai.[19] He was given the monastic name of "Indapanno", meaning one who has wisdom like Indra.[20] Henceforth I will refer to Nguam as Indapanno to stress the change of his life from a layman to a monk. The new life as a monk proved not to be a burden, everything settled down after a few days. The peaceful atmosphere of the monastery, the restraint placed on his actions, speech and thoughts enabled him to be more peacefully mindful. He also enrolled at Nak tham school (Dhamma Study school) in Wat Nua.[21]

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of Buddha), Vinayamuk vol.1-3 (The entrance to the Vinaya). For more details see (Ishii: 1986).

19 Nguam was ordained at one temple but stayed at another because he had lived in Wat Mai when he was a child. His maternal granduncle had been the abbot of this temple and died there. His father had also ordained in this temple. One reason his ordination ceremony took place at Wat Nok was because his parents and the abbot were well acquainted with one another (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, pp. 41-42).

20 Indra is one of the Hindu Gods.

21 Nak tham school had been introduced to teach a basic standard of doctrinal studies for the newly ordained mohks and novices. The nak tham curriculum consist of three levels: elementary level (nak tham tri), intermediate level (nak tham tho), and advanced level (nak tham ek). The curriculum covered essential points of the doctrines so that one could understand these points

After having been ordained for only two days, the abbot encouraged him to preach, saying that Indapanno had a reputation of knowing dhamma well even when he was still a lay person. People found his preaching worthwhile listening to because they have never heard it before. Word spread and people flocked to come to listen. As the people enjoyed his sermons, the abbot asked him to preach everyday. The number of people attending his sermons increased remarkably because his preaching was new both in style and content. Traditional preaching simply involved reading ancient texts. Indapanno chose the dhamma topics he learned from Nak tham school, explained them in simple terms and supplemented them with parables from the Jataka (legend).

As his popularity increased people from other temples came to attend his sermons. Other temples had to arrange their preaching schedules to accommodate Indapanno's sermons. Especially on observance days he preached in different temples at different times: first at one temple, then to a second and finally at his own, some people listened to all three sermons.[22] He became a famous preacher in Phumrieng with an average of 30-40 people attending his sermons. On certain days the sermon hall would be overflowing. Many young people started attending, which pleased the abbot.

Indapanno devoted his time mostly in studying, reading and drafting the sermons. His curiousity led him to study dhamma from every book available in the locality at that time, including the Buddhist journal of Dhamma Caksu (Eye of the Dhamma) which was issued under the authority of Wachirayan (Vajiranana).[23] In this journal, there were translations of various sutta from the Tipitaka, in a style independent of the senior monks of that time.

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easily. Success in the three levels of doctrinal exams was made an essential qualification for candidacy for the traditional Pali studies. The majority of monks who remained for any length of time in the robe came to aspire at least to pass these exams. It was virtually the only incentive for studying the dhamma (Ishii: 1986, p.76).

22 During the Buddhist Lent, every temple arranged preaching each evening; after the Lent preaching occurred only on holy days and festival days (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 48).

23 Dhamma Caku was a Buddhist magazine published for intellectuals and writers who were interested in Buddhism. Buddhadasa recalled that the monks who were remarkable in writing and translation at that time were mainly Thammayut monks because they were educated and were supported by noblemen while the Mahanikaya monks were still lagging behind in that aspect (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 52).

Indapanno was immersed in various activities and had also written a two-page newspaper to be distributed inside the temple everyday. This newspaper had articles, jokes, cartoons and caricatures which he handed out to the other monks after the evening chanting.[24] Certainly, it improved his writing anis a way of spreading his ideas as well. He issued the newspaper for two years.

As we shall see Indapanno's intention in studying was not only to amass knowledge for its own sake but to spread it to others from the beginning. He enjoyed preaching, studying and performed well in his monastic exams. He had a good relationship with the abbot and his comrade monks. He forgot about his first intention to be a monk only for three months. He enjoyed the monastic life very much and did not have to worry about the shop because his younger brother, Yee-Guey, had left school and taken responsibility for the family shop.

Pali Study in Bangkok

Indapanno continued his studies through a second pansa (Buddhist Lent) and passed the intermediate level of Nak tham (Nak tham tho). Then, his uncle Siang from Chumporn, who had been a monk in Bangkok for many years, took the trouble to push him up to Bangkok, where he could advance in his scriptural studies. His mother and brother also agreed that he should remain a monk. It was well known that if one wanted to make progress in the monkhood, one had to further one's scriptural studies in Bangkok.[25] In 1928, Indapanno went to study the Pali scriptures in Bangkok and stayed at Wat Pathumkhongka.

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24 After Indapanno handed out the newspaper to other monks, he would shut himself in his own room, listening to their laughter, criticising or mis- understanding. He found this very enjoyable. (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p.50).

25 The traditional Pali studies begin with the third grades to the ninth grades (Prayok 3-Prayok 9), grade 1 and 2 were recognized not as independent grades but as preliminary stages to grade 3; only when a candidate had passed all three grades did he earn the appellation of Parian. He would also be addressed with the honorfic "Maha" before his name. The Pali studies focused on the translation syllabi from Pali to Thai and Thai to Pali. The latter, though termed "translation," actually involves the literal reproduction of the Pali texts; free translation is not acceptable. The Pali studies are classified by the division of the Tipitaka to which they pertain: the Sutta Pitaka for grades 3 to 6, the Vinaya Pitaka for grades 6 to 8, and Abhidhamma Pitaka for grades 8 to 9. What is characteristic is that none of the texts belong to the Pali Tipitaka; all are extracanonical commentaries. The students have no opportunity to address themselves to the original scriptures; they are required only to memorize and reproduce faithfully the orthodox commentaries (Ishii: 1986, pp. 94-95).

As Bangkok was the center of Pali studies, Indapanno was under the impression that monks in Bangkok did their best and lived correctly by the dhamma-vinaya (monastic discipline). They were to him the perfect role-model for monks because of their complete knowledge of the Scripture. Pali scholars with the ninth grade, he thought, were arahants (those who had attained Nibbana) and Bangkok was full of them.[26] Indapanno's idealized view of monastic life in Bangkok was quickly shattered. The environment of noisy traffic, heat, dust, and crowded canals made him home-sick and he wanted to return home.[27] Everything in Bangkok seemed the opposite of what he had imagined.[28] Most of the monks simply studied for a degree and then disrobed to take a job and start a family. All of this was a severe shock to Indapanno's feelings and disappointed him. There was nothing in Bangkok that he was looking for. It was time to stop and try somethings else. He lost enthusiasm for his studies and instantly decided to return home to disrobe after having stayed in Bangkok for only two months.

After returning home, his life became peaceful again and it was very close to the beginning of the Buddhist Lent. Indapanno decided to stay through his third Buddhist Lent at the former temple and studied the advanced level of Nak tham (Nak tham ek) by himself. He had become bored with school and teachers and did not believe that his teachers were truly knowledgeable. He passed his examination well. At the beginning of 1929, a Nak tham school was established at Wat Bhotaram, a royal temple at Chaiya. Indapanno was asked to be a teacher there for one year. This provided him with a good opportunity. No doubt, Indapanno had much freedom in selecting the teaching methodology in the two classes he taught. He

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26 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 83.

27 Buddhadasa recalled that Bangkok's environment and the temple in which he was staying was not only hot, dusty and noisy but also the garbage and polluted water in almost every canal emitted foul smells. The canal water was unusable when the tide was high and polluted water fused with the water in the utility well. Many noisy, smelly pigs also lived under his kuti (monk residence) (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 84).

28 Buddhadasa recounted that Pali scholar-monks did not make any difference; their behavior was more heretical than the less educated rural novices and monks who still more strictly followed the monastic disciplines. For example, monks in Bangkok were not mindful of their eating etiquette; they chatted and laughed all the time like drunkards; they cracked open eggs and fried them. They did all these in spite of knowing that what they did violated monastic discipline (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 52).

enjoyed it much partly because it was a new experience. All of his students in both classes successfully passed their exams. He instantly became a famous young teacher and received a typewriter as a reward.

Back to Bangkok Again

After a year of teaching, his uncle Siang again persuaded him to return to study Pali in Bangkok. Indapanno went back to Bangkok again in 1930. He stayed at the same temple in the same environment he already had experienced; but, this time he was wiser and lived in the capital in a different state of mind than before. Why did Indapanno go back to Bangkok without any hesitation? As far as I can determine, the one year as a teacher enabled him to develop a foundation for comprehension of Buddhist doctrine before moving on to the interpretation level of expressing critical ideas independently. While he was trying to explain the basic dhamma to his students, he realized its profound value and significance for his own life as well. He also did not think of disrobing and intended to learn Pali first, since it was the key to further studies in Buddhism from the original Pali texts. However, after he had attended the class for a few days, he could not put up with its sluggish pace. He was permitted to be absent. He studied the third level of Pali partly by himself, and partly by private tutorial with a monk from Phumrieng.[29]

Apart from this, he was interested in other branches of knowledge such as natural science, photography, typewriter repair, and also began to study English by himself. Particularly, he kept up with current events of the country and was much impressed by the writing of progessive leading Thai intellectuals, who returned from studying in Europe, namely, Chaopraya Thammasak Montri and Praya Anumanrajadon especially, what they wrote about science, world history and dhamma.[30] In this year (1930), Indapanno wrote his first two articles. The first was a long article entitled "The Worldlings Level of Buddhism" published on the occasion of the opening of a Nak tham school at Chaiya. It was rather daring for the clergy of that time. Its content gave a critical look at Buddhism, explaining the benefits

29 Pali study began with the third level to the ninth level.

30 Pasanadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 113.

and advantages of Buddhism in contemporary meanings. Indapanno commented on attaining Nibbanna as the ultimate goal of Buddhism in the present, not as some distant ideal. This was quite innovative, for most Thai Buddhists, both monks and laymen, believed firmly that the attainment of Nibbana was virtually impossible in the present life. His second article was entitled "The Benefits of Giving" written for distribution at the funeral of his preceptor (the monk who ordained him). In it, he answered questions for the new generation who had begun to suspect the benefits of making merit. He also tried to lay the foundation of understanding Buddhism and presented new concepts appropriate for the people of that time such as that spritual benefit of giving was the decrease in selfishness.

Both articles clearly illustrated that Indapanno had a strong committment to the ideals of Buddhism and their interpretation for a modern audience. He resolutely attempted to participate in maintaining the tradition in taking responsibility for its problems and deterioration. However, both articles have some traces of influence of the traditional concepts such as the belief in the next life.

After passing his third level Pali examination, Indapanno became a Pali scholar-monk (Pha Maha Parien) as he had wished. In the following year, he studied at a higher level but his determination wavered because he had ambiguous feelings about its value. He was dissatified partly with the clerical education of that time since Pali study did not focus on the Tipitaka but on the commentaries. Whereas he wanted to translate Pali into simple Thai so that readers could comprehend, the ecclesiastical Pali curriculum required the students to translate the texts following a prescribed style. Consequently, his translation of the assigned Pali texts differed from his teacher's, as was clear on the pre-examination.[31] This was to be expected as he had not attended the class since the beginning.

Accumulation of knowledge, comprehension and critical views, together with reading more of the works of the leading Thai intellectuals, both monks and laymen, made Indapanno's interest in Buddhism extend beyond the scope of his formal studies and

31 The translation of Buddhst doctrine in the curriculum is the word-by-word Pali-Thai translation to maintain all the words and style in the source language. Thus, people in general do not understand it (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, 118).

examinations. He studied and learned in an independent manner. These factors drove him to deviate from his original intention of continuing with formal Pali studies.

Criticism of the Thai Sangha

During the time Indapanno was in Bangkok (1930-1932) he was influenced by several significant events. The Thai Sangha came under severe outside criticism regarding the conduct and way of life of the monks which were not in line with the dhamma- vinaya. The government at that time tended to give an opportunity for free criticism. Many lay people joined in groups to revive Buddhism in various ways. One group, led by Narin Phasit, critisized the Thai Sangha most strongly and declared themselves as revivers of Buddhism in its 25th century. The main point under attack was the excessively luxurious life style of the monks.

Narin published books that attacked the Buddhist establishment and showed pictures of heretical behavior of monks in Bangkok, including the senior monks. He also established a temple for women and ordained his two daughters as female novices so as to revive the Buddhist tradition of having four constituent groups: Bhikkhu (male monk), Bhikkhuni (femal monk), lay man, lay woman. It was Narin's wish to promote Buddhism which he considered to have decayed because the Sangha no longer had the full complement of both male and female monks as at Buddha's time. The official Order of Theravada Bhikkhuni had fallen into decay before Thailand officially became Buddhist over seven hundred year ago. Narin's group was active for about three to four years and then he lost support because of the way he had gone about his vehement attack against the sanctity of the Sangha. Therefore, the majority of Thai people began to disagree with them.

Indapanno was influenced by this criticism and had an opportunity to look critically at the problems and the reality of those days, as well as future solutions. The problems of the degeneration of the Sangha occupied Indapanno more and more. However, even though Indapanno objected strongly to monastic excesses and impropriety, he did not participate in the activities of Narin's group because he saw that what Narin did, was not the way to reform

Buddhism. He felt that attempts to reform the Sangha were impossible through external criticism. Instead, he believed the Sangha itself should return to its original tenets as found in the Pali Canon.[32] However, many of his monastic friends, including his Pali tutor, did not agree with him. They believed that it was impossible to return to the original way of life as indicated by the Pali Canon since the world had greatly changed.

It was likely that his ideas about Buddhism and the direction of his own life crystallized during the three years Indapanno spent in Bangkok in the early 1930s. There is evidence that while Indapanno was staying in Bangkok, he and his brother not only exchanged information and ideas through letters, mostly relating to the situation of the Thai Sangha in Bangkok including Narin's activities, but also co-operated in spreading their ideas.[33] From Indapanno's letters, it is clear that he charted their work according to the following plan: first, they had to acquire a complete set of the Tipitaka so that he could work with the original sources; second, they had to study the tenets of Buddhism from a variety of interpretative perspectives; finally, they should search for a practical method of practice consistent with the basic teachings in the Tipitaka.

To carry out the last point, they agreed to find a site to facilitate dhamma practice by dedicated monks, hoping that this would promote Buddhism in what was assumed to be the last half of its life (2500 years). There was no place as appropriate as Phumrieng. As for the first two points, he had already started collecting as many volumes of the Tipitaka as possible and studied them by himself without depending on standard interpretations of the others.[34] The more widely and deeply he studied the original Pali Text, the more his confidence grew in the highest ideal of Buddha's teaching. Indapanno, at that time (1932), was not interested in studying for an examination at all.

Bangkok and Despair

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32 Ibid., pp. 121-122.

33 Chit: 1971, pp. 35-39.

34 Ibid., p. 40-41.

The outcome of Indapanno's level-four Pali examination was that he failed it, as expected. He then completely gave up his original intention of taking examinations to become a higher level Pali scholar. He prepared to return to Phumrieng in a state of some despair about his own monastic career, as well as the state of Thai society and Thai Buddhism. He noted that "there was nothing satisfying or worth doing in Bangkok, because there were too many constraints".[35] He thought of going away from Bangkok and doing something more substantial in the countryside; but exactly what he would do was still uncertain.

Indapanno was confident that living according to the dictates of the Pali Canon and following the dhamma-vinaya was correct. He also wanted to recover the forms of early Buddhist practice, despite the fact that he himself did not really know much about them. Indapanno did not doubt that his Pali knowledge was sufficient to work with the Tipitaka. Furthermore, he was convinced that the study of Buddhist doctrine relied not only on a knowledge of Pali but also on contemplation and reason. The following is a quote from a letter by Indapanno to his younger brother, Yeeguey, before leaving Bangkok which illustrates his intention at that time.

> "... I cannot tell the exact date of my coming back home, but I have definitely changed my view from what I once held. This is because I fortunately found some good scriptures that helped me decide resolutely to leave Bangkok. I intend to find a retreat far from external and internal disturbances so that I can scrutinize the dhamma subjects that I have learned and hope to interpret. When I have finished my study, and attained a sufficient grasp of the principles of dhamma to make sure that my research will not go astray, I will abandon the textbooks then lead an unencumbered life and search for purity and truth. I am looking for a retreat where I can temporarily stay and work with my textbooks. I am totally blind about where, if it is not our home village. Everyone should think of me as if I were not staying in Phumrieng at all. I need someone who will help enhance my chances for study. For boarding, please make little change from before. If nothing is available, cooked rice offered mixed with a dash of fish sauce will be all right.
>
> Bangkok is not the place to find purity. The mistake I made in enrolling in the ecclesiastical study is a blessing, for it makes me aware that I made a wrong step. Had I not know this, I would have made many more, and, as some people have learned, it would have been difficult to retreat. With the awareness that I made a mistake I can discover how to step forward correctly....I have followed the world from the minute I was born to this moment. From now on: I will seek

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35 Ibid., p.138

> purity and follow the path of the Buddha which he had finally discovered. If I still stubbornly follow the world, I will lag far behind and will never enter the path. While I depend on the world physically, I will try my best to become detached from it spiritually so that I can find purity in the present....[36]

From this letter, it is obvious what Indapanno intended to do when he returned home. He convincingly emphasized that the pursuit of degrees in high-level monastic education in Bangkok was wrong. He not only criticized Thai Buddhist institutional schools but also disagreed with temple practice and the Sangha institute. He neglected his formal studies in Bangkok which he saw as irrelevant to the crucial problems facing Buddhism.[37] The crisis of religion had challenged him to go "back to the source" to the original teachings and sought for the revival of Buddhism. Indapanno realized well the failures of a variety of lay groups in Thailand which had tried to reform the Sangha, such as Narin's group. Revitalizing Buddhism or even reforming the Thai Sangha was not easy. However, Indapanno chose to return to Phumrieng to begin following his ideas. This move has been seen as the decisive event in the foundation of his reform movement. Later he said:

> "In returning to Phumrieng at that time, I did not have any clear plans, but it was the only choice left. Having turned towards Buddhism, I had to go all the way. I was born in a merchant family which had almost nothing to do with religion. Discarding the family tradition, I was left only with the desire of wanting to do better than what others had been doing. Thus, I was diligent in self-training which was actually unorthodox for a merchant".[38]

Life at Suan Mokkh

Period of Isolation

When he returned to Phumrieng in 1932 at the age of 26, the dhamma study group (Dhammadana Group) led by his younger brother, Yee-Guey looked for a place for his seclusion and independence. A deserted temple named "Wat Traphang Chik" near Phumrieng which had been abandoned for over 80 years and which was in a dense jungle of 28 acres,

36 Chit: 1971, p. 35-39 (translation by author).

37 For more detail discussion in Chapter 2.

38 Chit: 1971, p. 140.

was Indapanno's dwelling. A small hut was built for him as he wished.[39] He moved there in May, 1932, and named the place "Suan Mokkhabalarama" or "Suan Mokkh", meaning the Garden of Liberation. Calling a temple "Suan" (garden) is not common in Thailand. "Wat" is a traditional word designating a place containing the more conspicuous and elaborately decorated public buildings, namely, the vihara or the preaching hall, the sala (pavilions) where services are held, and sermons addressed to lay people, the bot (chapel) is used both for those activities relating to disciplinary affairs, which are the exclusive concern of the Sangha, and for other ceremonies such as ordination ceremony. The typical Wat has been traditional for a thousand of years. The word "Suan", however, denotes a natural environment where monks who search for liberation live in solitude under the shade of trees. Suan Mokkh represents, to the degree that it is possible, an original Buddhism designed with a sensitivity to the modern context.[40]

In June, 1932 (a month after Buddhadasa set up Suan Mokkh) Thailand changed from an absolute monarchy to monarchical democracy. Thus, Suan Mokkh was started in the same year as this government reform. Suan Mokkh came into existence when Indapanno became a forest monk.[41]

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39 Indapanno's dwelling was a small hut one and a half meters wide and two meters long. The walls and the roof were thatched. Twenty-eight acres of dense jungle surrounded his residence. See Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Seebpee Nai Suan Mokkh* [Ten Years in Suan Mokkh], (Bangkok: Kongtuun Vudhitham, 1984), pp. 5-8.

40 Although, there were some Wat called "Suan", for instance, Wat Suan Dok in Chiang Mai. But the reason for naming Wat Suan Dok differed from what Buddhadasa meant. The name, Wat Suan Dok was given because it was only located at Suan Dok sub-distric. Moreover, the buildings of this Wat were not distinct from other Wats.

41 The history of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka noted that in the first century B.C., there was a debate among several hundred monks who assembled at a conference to decide whether the basis of sasana (religion) was learning or practice. It was decided that learning was the basis of sasana rather than practice, and the Dhammakathikas (prechers learned in the dhamma) succeeded in silencing the Pamsukulikas (who wore robes made of rags). Thus out of such controversies in institutionalized Buddhism grew two vocations which were not so distinguished in the original texts: the vocation of books (gantha-dhura) and the vocation of meditation (vipassana-dhura), the former being considered the more important. Thailand received the concept of two forms of monks since the nineteenth century. In both Sri Lanka and Thailand the established view is that the Sangha has ritual and spiritual obligations to the laity. The recommended ideal is for monks to be gramavasi (residing in towns and villages and engaging themselves in educational and religious activities) rather than arannavasi or forest monks (residing in the forest and engaged in meditation with no obligations to the laity) see Tambiah, S.J., "The Buddhist Arahant: Classical Paradigm and Modern Thai Manifestations" in *Saints and Virtures* (Hawley: 1987, pp. 111-2).

The first two years at Suan Mokkh, Indapanno had adopted a life of total isolation, seeing no one even to the point of having his brother leave his food hanging from a tree every day in order to avoid the human contact that is part of the monk's traditional morning begging rounds. He spent his time in solitary contemplation, private study of the Tipitaka and steadfastly practising the way of a forest monk following the dhamma-vinaya as a means to understand their meaning, value and their physical and spiritual effects. He discovered the reasons behind various monastic orders through his own experience. These regulations, he say, all aim at testing and improving mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.[42]

For serious meditating, Indapanno had to research the Tipitaka to resolve enigmatic and problematic practices in the sense that why no one could attain Nibbana in this life. He collected a set of texts on step-by-step practices and translated them into Thai so that they could be used as a guide to track the original path that the Buddha had trod. "Following the Arahats' Footprints" was first published in journal Buddhadasana in 1933 by Yee-Guey (Dhammadasa).[43] It was the first piece of work following the establishment of Suan Mokkh and introduced the name "Buddhadasa" to Thai Buddhist circles. He announced the use of this name in a vow of sincere intention prior to his translation and writing which began in August, 1932. His vow was as follows:

> I bestow this life and body to the Buddha. I am the servant of the Buddha, and the Buddha is my master. Thereby, I am named Buddhadasa.[44]

Henceforth I will refer to Indapanno as Buddhadasa (which means Servant of the Buddha) which he prefers to be called. Buddhadasa's practice was far beyond that expected of

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42 Examples of Buddhadasa's experiments were refraining from talking, secluding himself completely for 3 months (during the Buddhist Lent), and eating specific food (exclusively vegetable, fruit, or rice, each for a period of 7 days). Through his experience he gained knowledge of the relationship between the real need of the body and the habitual desire of the mind. Abandonning the use of umbrella and shoes was another way of training the body to become strong and to withstand the weather. The way of the monk was the least complicated and the most economical. Most of the time, it should be devoted to research and practice in spiritual matters (Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, pp. 152-155).

43 Dhammadasa is the new name of Yee-Guey who changed his name in 1932.

44 Chit: 1971, p. 1.

traditional Thai Buddhism. Why did he want to practise such a servere asceticism? It can be understood partly that he wanted to live up to the spirit of a Buddhist monk. At least he knew the discrepancy between the actual monastic life and dhamma-vinaya. He wrote about this difference in his diary:

> During the days of my life in the forest, everything gave me something to think about. I had so many new feelings that I could not record all of them in writing. Situations of profound meanings and also of difficult problems are aroused by natural setting, especially when a place is not altered from its original condition. Even reading the Tipitaka, in Bangkok was about four or five times less inspiring than doing so in a quiet forest, the latter I enabled to discover many more of its meanings. For dhamma study and practice, one to be studied directly from nature. Living simply in harmony with nature also helps create a mind that observes, understands, and knows its own nature and its change. Knowledge obtained from spiritual experiments with one's mind, and that gained from speculation on principles and theories in books are quite far apart. I feel that I have changed into a new person.[45]

This quote is a part of the answer to the question of why Buddhadasa thought differently from other monks. He loved self-study and what he called "experiments" from the beginning. While recognizing the importance of a teacher, he nonetheless believed that determination, reading and careful study provided a better understanding and a wider variety of perspectives. These are some of the ingredients that led to unconventional interpretations of the dhamma.

Teaching and Travelling

The first two years (1932-1933) Buddhadasa lived alone at Suan Mokkh and adopted a life of isolation. After this period he returned to normal monastic life, his younger brother, Dhammadasa published a quarterly journal of <u>Buddhasasana</u> in 1933 in order to spreading Buddhism. Buddhadasa became more involved in spreading his ideas, both for the people in his home town and for national distribution. He wrote many articles for the journal which was the starting point of his enormous study in many other fields that he did in comparative religions, religious problems philosophy, psychology and natural science. In the third year

45 Ibid., pp. 54-58.

(1934) another forest monk accompanied him and over the next few years, especially during the Buddhist Lent, the number of monks and novices residing at Suan Mokkh grew to ten. In this years Buddhadasa began one of the most challenging tasks in his life, a series of Tipitaka was selected and arranged soly the teachings of Buddha from His Own Words as recorded in the Pali Tipitaka for translation into Thai in a language understandable to the ordinary reader. He has worked in this series, since the beginning of Suan Mokkh, periodically publishing them into four subjects, until completing them in 1984.[46]

About 1934, Buddhadasa was invited by Lokanatha Bhikkhu, a leader of the Buddhist missionary movement in Burma for propagating Buddhism world-wide by taking pilgrimages to India, Jerusalem, Rome and to establish Buddhism in Europe but he refused since he disagreed with such a long trip where the results were uncertain.[47] Together with studying and practising the dhamma, Buddhadasa also collaborated with the activities of Dhammadana Group which were more involved Buddhism in traditional practises so that there was a change in a small group of laity in the rural area.

In 1935, Dhammadana Group moved to Chaiya (six kilometers from Phumrieng), due to extension of the railway. Buddhadasa regularly walked 4 times a month from Phumrieng to give sermons at the new site of Dhammadana Group office. In the following years (1936), Buddhadasa and his younger brother contributed to local education by establishing a public library and a school in Chaiya by the financial support of his mother and voluntary labour of

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46 The work of this series consist of four topics: *The Buddha's Lift from His Own Words, Treasure from the Buddha`s Own Words, Dependent Origination from the Buddha's Own Words, Noble Truth from the Buddha's Own Words*.

47 Around 1933, there was a Buddhist missionary movement under the leadership of Lokanatha Bhikkhu, an Italian who was ordained in Burma in 1925. He resolved that he would propagate Buddhism after his attainment of arahantship (one who has attained to Nibbana). The attainment was to come first, and the propagation of Buddhism would come afterwards. He declared that he would work as a dhamma dissemintor by leading monks who devoted their lives to Buddhism on walking on pilgrimages to various countries. For the propagation of Buddhism world-wide, he persuaded monks from Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand to take pilgrimages to India, Jerusalem, Rome and to establish Buddhism in Europe. He came to persuade Thai monks to join such trips between 1933 to 1934. There were many Thai monks and novices joined him. See Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Chum-num Kor-kit Idsara* [A Miscellany of Teaching] (Bangkok: Klangwittaya, 1968), pp.182-186.

monks and laymen in locality.[48] There is evidence that Buddhadasa also thought of a plan to manage a university which would teach Buddhism just like other subjects so that students could learn dhamma thoroughly enongh to apply to their way of life and society, but it was not to be done, probably because of the financial problems.[49]

In 1937, Buddhadasa's translation of the Buddha's Life in His Own Words was accepted as a textbook by the Mahamakut Buddhist University of Thammayut Order. It was a highly successful book, becoming more popular than other translations of the Buddha's Life, namely, that by Wachirayan (Vajiranana), a former Supreme Patriarch of Thai Sangha (1900-1910). The important point of this book is, Buddhadasa illustrated dhamma principles existing in Buddha's life, how he existed in real life and how he was successful in transcending suffering.[50] Certainly, Buddhadasa intended to make a history of Buddha's life as a realistic model for the contemporary man.

In the same year, Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (Charoen Nanavarathera) of Wat Thepsirin, who was also the Chairman of the Sangha Council, paid Buddhadasa the honour of privately visiting him at his remote forest hermitage.[51] Through the journal Buddhasasana, Buddhadasa's ideas of interpretating Buddhism by stressing worldly activism and individualistic responsibility, had inspired a small circle of intellectuals in Bangkok. In 1938, a group of high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Justice visited Suan Mokkh where they studied the dhamma while staying in small huts and took care of all their needs. This was the first group of laymen from Bangkok.[52] They also financially supported Suan Mokkh's

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48 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 93.

49 Ibid., p. 221

50 Buddhadasa divided the ways of writing the Buddha's Life into 3 catagories. The first one is written for the purpose of persuading the majority of people to have faith in Buddha through many miracles, namely, Pathomsompot. The second one is to illustrate the historical fact which is the type the majority of students are interested in, for instance, *The History of Buddha's Life* translated by Vajiranana or *Life of Buddha* by E.J. Thomas. The third one is to present the dhamma through the *Buddhd's Life* as he did.

51 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 114.

52 This group consisted of Phraya Latphli Thamma-Prakhan, the Minister of Justice; Phraya Phroratchasuphit, a judge of the Appeal Court and Sanya Thammasak. All of them are barrister-at-law trained in England. Especially, Sanya Thammasak later, was the President of Thammasat University, the President of Supreme Court and the Prime Minister of Thailand

actvities and publications.

In 1938, another step was taken, Buddhadasa developed the methodology and the scope of explaining Buddhist's teachings through other doctrines such as Zen, Tao, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Natural Science in order to introduce Theravada Buddhism in various aspects to the contemporary people. It was unusual for Thai Theravada tradition at that time. The other religious doctrines were never introduced properly before and most of the people did not accept them. Buddhadasa had offered articles and translation of the teachings of various religions through the journal Buddhasasana. Buddhadasa translated Lankavatara sutta, a highly respective sutta of Mahayana from English into Thai and published it in the Buddhasasana in 1937. There was no negative response from the readers.[53] Similarly, Zen Buddhism was unknown in Thailand until he translated The Hui Neng Sutta and The Zen Teaching of Huang Po from English into Thai. In the journal Buddhadasa also published articles written by students of Islam.[54]

Since 1940, Buddhadasa's work of propagating Buddhist exegesis took another big step. He accepted an invitation from the Buddhist Association of Thailand, a most important venue for Buddhist intellectuals, to give a lecture in Bangkok. It was the first time of what was to become many apprearences. “The Way to Reaching Buddha-Dhamma”, Buddhadasa explained a high level interpretation dhamma principles which he compared to their scientific counterparts. It was innovative and greatly enhanced public awareness at that time. As a result, the lecture was published in a book and was reprinted many times over. Chao Phraya Thammasak Montri (the Minister of Education at that time) commented that this book would be of enduring significance. The prediction turned out to be true, after more than fifty years, it still is being reprinted regularly.[55]

The first challenging lecture resulted in Buddhadasa being favored by intellectuals in

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(1973-1976). At present he is the President of the Privy Council.

53 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu, ed., *Phab Chivit Paadseebpee Buddhadasa* [The Life Image of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu at 8o Years Old], (Bangkok: Komolkeemthong, 1986), p. 327.

54 Santikaro Bhikkhu: dated unknown, p. 16.

55 Ibid., p. 11.

the capital. He was gradually recognised in both lay and monastic circles, gaining more fame as a creative interpretator of Buddhist teachings. Consequently, a number of monks and laymen visited Suan Mokkh. A big site was necessary. A new location with an area of 124 acres, five kilometers outside Chaiya, was found in 1943. It was a big forest park similar to one in the Buddha's time to stimulate monks and novices to pay more attaintion to dhamma practice. And in the following year (1944) Buddhadasa moved to the new Suan Mokkh. This continues with approximately 70 monks to be his base until today.

Throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s, Buddhadasa travelled extensively, as he was invited by various prestigious institutions in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand, for instance, Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, the ecclesastical universities, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Teacher Colleges and various temples to give sermons and lectures.[56] Some lectures, such as "Buddha-Dhamma and the Spirit of Democracy", were attended by the Regent, Pridi Phanomyoung, a prominent political elite, who was another of Buddhadasa's admirers. There was evidence that he invited Buddhadasa to meet him at his house three times. Although the contents of the conversations were not recorded, one topic was the Regent's consultation regarding setting up dhamma centers like Suan Mokkh in many places including Ayuthaya, his home town, and a plan for promoting a proper form of Buddhism.[57] All these projects had to be cancelled, though, when Pridi faced political difficulties and had to leave the country.

Buddhadasa became the symbol of a modern lecturer-monk who preached on up to date topics relevant to the current situation and socio-political problems in Thailand. He was the first monk to be accepted by the democratic and socialist sections of the Thai intelligensia. Kulab Saipradit, a famous socialist writer, wrote articles of Buddhadasa's ideas in his column. Buddhadasa's work was also favored by other senior Mahanikaya and Thammayut monks. Many eccesiastical positions of Buddhadasa were appointed by the seniors monks in Bangkok. However, his position was not without dispute. He was opposed by conservative

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56 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 231.

57 Interview with Phra Panyananda Bhikkhu. Buddhadasa invited him to paticipate with the Regent on the second time.

monks and laymen such as those from the Abhidhamma Foundation and Anan Senakhan who strongly disagreed with his interpretation of Buddhism to the point of accusing that Buddhadasa devalues Buddhism by explaining it simply and that tried to match the ultimate truth of Buddhism with the ideas of modern man. Buddhadasa was even accused of being a heretic and communist. By 1947, the number of his journals and books had increased, partly because of his famous lectures in Bangkok.

During 1949-1951, Buddhadasa was appointed by the Sangha to be the fifth regional leader for dhamma propagation throughout the 14 provinces of the South.[58] Beginning in 1950 he accepted an invitation from Phraya Amornrit Thamrong, the Royal Commissioner for the Southern Region, to go on an official dhamma propagation tour to every district of the South to teach and train government officials, students, local leaders and people. Due to his translation of Buddha's life, in 1954, Buddhadasa took pilgrimages to India to study and understand the historical background of Buddhism and Indian culture, he visited the four important places of Buddha's life. From 1956 to 1966 he was invited to lecture on dhamma ten hours during the annual training of prospective judges,[59] and after 1966, this training programme has been carried out at Suan Mokkh until today.

In 1957, Buddhadasa was appointed to a special assignment as the Thai Sangha representative to the Sixth Buddhist Council in Burma.[60] There he delived a speech on the subject of "Certain Wonderful Characteristics of Theravada Buddhism".[61] In the following year (1958), Buddhadasa was appointed abbot of Wat Phra Brommathat, a royal temple in Chaiya.

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58 Santikaro Bhikkhu: dated unknown, p. 12.

59 Ibid., p. 13.

60 Ibid., p. 16.

61 Ibid., p. 16.

Retreat to Suan Mokkh

After 1966, Buddhadasa stopped accepting invitations to give lectures outside Suan Mokkh due to his health, and his sermon program at Suan Mokkh was also reorganized: from lecturing every day during the Buddhist Lent (3 months) to lecturing on consecutive Saturdays (except during the Buddhist Lent) so that people from other provinces including Bangkok could have a chance to attend them. However, besides the Saturday dhamma lecture, numerous sermons were given on special occasions for different groups that asked for training such as students ordained during summer vacation, officials from many different offices, people in general and foreigners. Each sermon and training session was tape-recorded and many of them have still not been published.

In 1968, he was asked by the Sangha authorities to train monks going abroad as "dhamma ambassador" to propagate Buddhism. Throughout the 1970s until today Buddhadasa's teaching has increasingly attracted a large number of Thai intellectuals. At the same time his thought -as presented by himself and by others- is clearly concerned with social and political affairs. His works such as <u>Dhamma and Politics</u> and <u>Dhammic Socialism</u> constituted religious discourses. Seminars were held in universities, Buddhist Associations to discuss his ideas. Many series of his books were translated into foreign languages such English, German, France, Greece, and Chinese. Some American colleges and universities offer programs in Buddhist Studies, include Buddhadasa's writings.[62]

In 1977, the Dalai Lama, the Supreme Head of Tibetan Buddhism visited Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh. From 1978 until today Buddhadasa's teachings have been broadcast on radio every month by the national broadcasting.[63] In 1980, the Supreme Patriarch visited him at Suan Mokkh and Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University of Mahanikai Order bestowed on him an Honorary Doctorate of Buddhism. From 1982 to 1988

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62 Ibid., p. 15.

63 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 287.

four State Universities in Thailand bestowed on Buddhadasa Honorary Doctorates.[64] In 1985, International Dhamma Hermitage, a new dhamma practice centre (about one kilometre from Suan Mokkh) was built for foreigners who increasingly come to practice dhamma at Suan Mokkh, including monthly dhamma courses and group training. It served as a meeting place between different schools of Buddhism and different religions. In 1989, Buddhadasa has received the high ecclesiastical title "Phra Dhammaghosacariya" from the king. At present Buddhadasa is 87 years old, and he continues to teach.

Buddhadasa has written more books on Buddhism than any other Buddhist scholars in the history of Thai Buddhism. It has been recorded that he has written more than two thousand books.[65] His important works have nearly all been written at his isolated retreat of Suan Mokkh. It is a paradox of Theravada Buddhism that the most far-reaching reforms and those with the greatest social impact may be developed in geographical isolation from the urban world that they are largely oriented towards changing.

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64 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1986, p. 443.

65 This is from the survey of Dr Louis Gabaude of Universite de La Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III, in 1988.

Chapter 4

Buddhadasa and His Interpretation of Buddhism

Buddhadasa has been called a religious reformer who sees the deeper implications of Buddhism. His interpretation of Buddhist doctrine makes him one of the most outstanding monks not only in Thailand but in Buddhist Asia as a whole.[1] Swearer compare him to Nagarjuna, the great Buddhist thinker and commentator of Mahayana Buddhism of the second century A.D.[2] It is generally recognized that Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism advocates a return to original Buddhism a strategy to adjust Buddhism to the needs of the modern world. This direction, according to Swearer, has important long-range consequences for the development of Buddhist thought in Thailand.[3]

It is impossible to separate Buddhadasa's thought from his interpretation of Buddhism. Almost all of his writings and preachings concentrate purposively on the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine. Buddhadasa points out that when it
is claimed that religion is unintelligible or irrelevant for the everyday life of contemporary man, religion itself, particularly, the problem of the "meaning" of religious language is partly to blame. The significance of the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, for Buddhadasa, goes far beyond the simple problem of communication. It is rather a problem of making religious forms "come alive" in modern world. The essence of the so-called "crisis of religion", is, thus, the problem of religious language.[4]

As an initial step to resolve this crisis, Buddhadasa interpreted the Pali Canon (the original Buddhist Scripture). A further step was to evolve a constructive criticisim of Thai Buddhism, in which he attempted a more relevant interpretation and application of Buddhist teachings.

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1 Swearer, D.K., "Reformist Buddhism in Thailand." in *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh*. Suan Usom Foundation ed. (Bangkok: Suan Usom Foundation, 1982), p. 486.

2 Swearer, D.K., trans. & ed. *Dhammic Socialism* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1986), p. 14.

3 Swearer, D.K., "Recent Trends in Thai Buddhism" in *Buddhism in the Modern World*. Dumoulin H. and Maraldo J. eds. (New York: Macmillan & Co.,1976), p. 104.

4 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Upasak Tee Mee Au Nai Kam Puud* [The Obstacle exist in Words],

This present chapter does not aim to deal directly with the whole contents of his teachings. I will not attempt the theologian's task. My perspective on him will be a sociological one. Thus one major focus will be to attempt to understand why Buddhadasa felt a reinterpretion of Buddhist doctrine was necessary, and how he has attempted to interpret the relevance of Buddhism for contemporary society. It will be useful to divide this chapter into three parts: the first part contains a summary of the underlying ideas and substantive methods of Buddhadasa's interpretation, the problem of his reinterpretation, and the consequences of misinterpretation; the second part deals with Buddhadasa's criticism of Thai Buddhism. In the final section I will examine the new perspective of his interpretation for Thai society.

Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism has been studied in recent years by anthropologists, theologists, and philosophers, but few have attempted to present his interpretation as well as its problems from the perspective of its own. As I already mentioned the significance of Buddhadasa's interpretation goes far beyond the simple problem of communication. Rather it addresses the problem of religious language per se. Therefore it is necessary to investigate this problem directly with reference to his works in order to understand what he considers as the cause of religious crisis. For these reasons, I choose to refer only to Buddhadasa's original works.

Buddhadasa's Reinterpretation of Buddhism

A consideration of Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism shows quite clearly that the central focus of his interpretation concerns the problem of meaning. This focus is highly complex as I have already mentioned in chapter 3. After Buddhadasa examined original texts of the Tipitaka (the original Buddhist Scripture) and practiced meditation at an abandoned temple, he realized the profound difference between the traditional Buddhist teachings and the doctrine in the Tipitaka, which he attempted to understand in terms of his own practical experiences. He thus became strongly committed to interpretation. Although in the initial

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(Bangkok: Arun Press, 1968), pp. 1-5.

stage his interpretation focused on the meaming of language, later he worked on the more doctrinal aspects. It should be noted that during the first thirty years the development of his thoughts was not quite systematic. Buddhadasa first introducted the concept of his interpretation in 1966.[5] Phasa- Khon Phasa-Tham (Everyday Language and Dhamma Language) is one of his most important essays. He introduced a distinction between the meaning of everyday language and religious language (dhamma language). The so-called concept of Phasa Khon-Phasa Tham is very important for understanding the structure of Buddhadasa's interpretation.

A General Understanding of Buddhadasa's Interpretation

Buddhadasa's concept of interpretation has nothing to do with a systematic presentation of language analysis in the context of Western philosophical terms and methods. He is not a philosopher in the Western sense. According to Seri Phongphit, he is a "Guru" or a "Master" who experience the Buddhist way of life and wants to transmit his comprehension to others.[6] Buddhadasa's argumentation centers around the distinction between everyday and dhamma language. Because of this distinction Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhist teaching is generally recognized in both lay and monastic circles as a creative interpretation which offers one of the most fruitful possibilities for the development of Thai Buddhism as a whole.[7]

An exploration of Buddhadasa's methodological interpretation helps us to comprehend the breadth and dynamism of his interpretation. We cannot pursue Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism without understanding the structure and function of his conception.

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5 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Phasa-Khon Phasa-Tham* [Everyday Language and Dhamma Language]. (Bangkok: Aksornsampan, 1967). See Pun Chongprasert, *Khon tay lae mee vinyan rue-mai* [Whether soul exists after death]. (Smutprakarn: The Buddhist Reform Organization, 1971), Preface.

6 Phongphit, Seri, in *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh*. ed. by Suan Usom Foundation, Bangkok: Suan Usom Foundation, 1982, p. 429.

7 Swearer, D.K., in *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh*. ed. by Suan Usom Foundation, Bangkok: Suan Usom Foundation, 1982, p. 496.

From the beginning Buddhadasa has clearly professed his commitment to understand and interpret Buddhism. He said that the main obstacle of Thai traditional Buddhism in making the Buddhist doctrine relevant to daily life lies in the very complicated problem of religious language. Religious language has special meanings which need to be interpreted by particular means. This is due to the fact that all profound words used in Buddhist doctrine, while identical to the everyday language of the people, also carry abstract and spiritual meanings. Most of all, it is another mode of meaning different from everyday language.

The Concept of Interpretation: Everyday and Dhamma Language

Buddhadasa noted that a sage or the Buddha naturally turn to the use of everyday expressions when they discover a spiritual insight or a new aspect of knowledge. They inevitably borrowed the spoken language of people at that time in communicating their new experiences but gave a new meaning to it. This new meaning is spiritual. It is another level of meaning which can be characterized by the intangible, or the non-physical; it is somehow impersonal and does not refer to "person" or "self".[8] This special mode of meaning is what Buddhadasa calls the "dhamma language" (Phasa Tham means the language of dhamma). By contrast, the meaning of ordinary language is based on sensory things and to be used under ordinary circumstances. It serves only physical and tangible things or possesses moralistic meanings. Buddhadasa names it the "everyday language" (Phasa Khon).[9] The categories of everyday and dhamma language do not refer to two different realities. Rather they are different ways of understanding the meanings of language. That is, there are two possible modes of meaning in a single word: one is the meaning the word has in everyday language; the other is the meaning that the same word has in dhamma language.

Buddhadasa emphasizes the differences in the twofold language meaning system, and stresses that the two levels must not be fused. Whenever they are confused, it is almost

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8 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Phasa-Khon Phasa-Tham* [Everyday Language and Dhamma Language]: 1967, pp. 4-6.

9 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

impossible to understand Buddhist teachings in the Buddhist sense. This is because the distinction in the levels of meaning points to distinctions in the ways of thought, understanding, and practice.

Buddhadasa noted that because of the depth and abstraction of the spiritual meaning of the teaching and the limited perspective of human language, the profound aspects of the teaching cannot to be taken literally. The confusion of interpretation, according to Buddhadasa, occurs when the profound is taken literally. He asserts that the significance of Buddhist teachings rest on spiritual meanings although it in transmitted in the form of ordinary language. The Tipitaka was recorded with ordinary language but it does not derive its meaning from ordinary language.[10] This is the problem.

Buddhadasa further indicates that there are a great many aspects of profound teachings most people do not understand because they are familiar only with everyday language. Moreover, when the Tipitaka is interpreted in terms of everyday language it is incomprehensible. He observes that the confusion between Buddhism and popular beliefs, and traditional formulations of Thai Buddhism consisting of miracles, and supernatural accounts, result because the Buddhist doctrine is not interpreted in terms of dhamma language. He suggests that the discrepancy between Buddhist miraculous stories and the accounts of modern science is inconsequential since these stories were not written as scientific accounts but rather to illustrate spiritual meaning. Therefore, whatever cannot be understand in ordinary language and considered as "myth" or "supernatual" could be "scientific" in the sense of dhamma language. That is, for Buddhadasa, in the deepest sense of traditional interpretation of Thai Buddhism, the form of everyday language which seems to be foundamentally misguided, is based on the standards of everyday and dhamma language.

Buddhadasa is concerned with the significance of dhamma language, and firmly maintains that everyday language is not the Buddhist language. He states however, that we should not understand these two layers of language as an extreme polarity such that everyday

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10 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Sandassetabbadhamma* (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1973), pp. 189, 204.

language is incorrect, while dhamma language is correct. Both the literal meanings of doctrine and their underlying spiritual meanings must be taken into acount in order to prevent the ambiguous confusion between the two modes of meaning.

Moreover, notes Buddhadasa, the Tipitaka contains both possible meanings of the doctrine. There are many examples in the Tipitaka which show that Buddha Himself taught dhamma using the two levels of meaning.[11] Buddhadasa stresses that it behooves us to be careful and to study deligently for correctly separating the particular teachings which have to be interpreted and the general teachings which needs no interpretation. But both of them were expressed in ordinary language.

The above notion reflects not only how an ordinary language may have two different modes of meaning but also implies that Buddhadasa understand language at two levels of meaning and form them basically as a key concept of his interpretation of Buddhadism: the everyday and the dhamma language.

It is true that the particular concept of Buddhadasa's interpretation which lies behind the extensive use of the two categories of everyday and dhamma language is not new. This distinction is rooted in the traditional Theravada conception of two approachs in understanding Buddhist teaching, namely, puggladhitthana and dhammadhitthana (personification, abstraction),[12]lokiya- vohara and lokutrara-vohara (mundane,

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11 Buddhadasa mentions both the Buddha's Own Word and the evidences in Sutta in order to demonstrate that Buddha utilized conventional language to communicate with ordinary people who in turn attempted to gain Buddhist teaching with their old beliefs so that they could better comprehend the meaning of their faith. Ordinary language enables them to approach the profound meaning gradually if they are provided with an appropriate explanation. As for the profound meaning (dhamma language) Buddha taught to the intellectuals who could understand another level of meaning. Thus the Tipitaka contains both possible meanings of the doctrine.

If Buddhadasa's observation has validity the question can be raised in any perspective assumed about the original form of the high intellectual Buddhist teaching or "old Buddhism" providing only to the certain group of intellectual elite which has been imagined by certain scholars, including Max Weber.

12 Lokiyavohara (personification) means giving a dhamma discourse by a relative means, that is, by talking an object or a person as the demonstration point. It always involves morality teaching through fairy tales, biolographies, or tales of miracles. Lokutravohara (abstraction) is the method of discourse based on dhamma principle, or conditions.

supramundane), etc and implies two levels of understanding.[13] And from our exploration we find that Buddhadasa uses these traditional principles as a base to set up his own hermeneutical principle. However, Buddhadasa's concept functions differently from conventional principles of interpretation which stand as a general reference of traditional formulations of Buddhism.

The categories of Phasa Khon and Phasa Tham (everyday and dhamma language) are more dynamic, flexible and go against the tendency towards stereotypical rigidity. They can be used in other ways than in terms of language. The concept of Phasa Khon and Phasa Tham open up several dimensions of Theravada tradition because they produce an openness toward the non-literal dimension of the Buddhist teaching. This allows Buddhadasa to develop a holistic understanding of Buddhist teaching from the perspective of human existence, whereby the highest ideals of Buddhism can be fused into the course of living in everyday life.

Thus the emphasis on the distinction between everyday and dhamma language is important for various reasons. It allows Buddhadasa to translate Buddhist teaching into two levels of understanding and practice. As a result, his concept is more than a means employed by Buddhadasa to criticize particular ideas and practices within Thai Buddhism. It also functions as the principle method which allows him progress beyond the confines of Theravada tradition to discuss the similarities between Buddhism and other religions.

However, it cannot be said that Buddhadasa has set up a new methodology or interpretation of Buddhist doctrine. Instead it is fair to say that Buddhadasa has built on the traditional principles in order to arrive at a more holistic interpretation of Buddhist teachings from the perspective of everyday life.

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13 The traditional Theravada conception of two levels of dhamma expounding is as follow:

1) Puggladhitthana-Dhammadhitthana (exposition the teaching in terms of persons and of ideas)
2) Lokiya and Lokuttara Vohara (mundane-supermundane exposition)
3) Sammuti-sacca and Paramattha-sacca (conventional truth and absolute truth)
4) Khanikavada-Sassatavada monentary saying and eternal saying)
5) Ditthadhammikattha and Samparayikattha Vohara (the meaning that can be experienced here and now; the meaning concern about the life to come).

Religious Language: the Problem of Interpretation

The problem of Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism can be formulated at two levels: one of meaning and one of translation.

Problems at the Level of Meaning

Buddhadasa places strong emphasis on the problem of the "meaning" of religious language, as well as on the confusion of communicating and expressing its meaning. He points out that although religious language is not a "private" language, it is ordinary language used in "another context" with qualifications which try to reflect "another experience". However, the difficulty rests on the breadth and abstraction of its spiritual meaning which cannot be exhaustively expressed in the limited scope of human language. Buddhadasa observes that the spiritual meaning of teaching (dhamma language) is not the literal meaning of the words. It cannot be completely understood through study but through realization and experience in daily life.[14] Therefore any interpretation inevitably encounters the following problems of understanding the meaning of religious language:

Borrowing and giving a new meaning

Borrowing and giving a new meaning to ordinary language generates two different levels of meaning. This is caused by the narrow and limited perspective of ordinary language which is insufficient to encompass the wider and more abstract dimensions of spiritual meanings. For instance, the word "enemy" in everyday language means someone whom we hate or who wants to harm us but its spiritual meaning is our own incorrect view or misdirected mind. Our own mind and the misuse of it is our real enemy, not someone else outside. It can be the most harmful enemy which we insufficiently know.

Moreover, giving a new meaning to ordinary language also creates a gap or mismatch

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14 Buddhadasa Buikkhu, *Obroom Phra Thammatut* [Training Monks for Mission Vol. I-III], (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1969), p. 28.

between the name and the new spiritual meaning: the new meaning is wider and more abstract, while the name used to call it remains the same. For example, the word "eating" in everyday language means to take in nourishment through the mouth in the usual way. But eating on dhamma level refers to a wide variety of sensual attachments, it can be done by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. The eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an odor, and it is much like eating. More problematically, the wider the spiritual meaning becomes, the looser it is. Therefore, it can be interpreted in great many ways.

The inadequancy of ordinary language and its limited scope play a part in putting the profound level of explanation of Buddhist doctrine in the negative form because it can not be actually said that "such a thing is anything" in the scope of human language. It is "not" this and "not" that. Therefore many Buddhist scriptures clarify the doctrine by a negative reference to the everyday expression. This leads to many other problems resulting in various misinterpretations of doctrine.

The simplicity of the meaning

Buddhadasa points out that the simple meaning of the language can become the obstacle for access to the deep meaning. Because people tend to overlook common matters, Buddhadasa emphasizes that the profound meaning of the doctrine frequently exists in the simple words that people do not take into account. Thus the simplicity of the meaning of language can shade or obscure the depth and useful meaning of the doctrine.

The variety of meaning

Buddhadasa notes that one should not rush to take one meaning of a word as a definite central meaning because one word can have many varieties of meanings. More frequently, in Buddhist language the meaning of a word is in the context of its use. For example, the word "death" has three possible meanings: the first is the meaning people generally understand, namely, physical death; the second is more profound; it is the meaning in terms of morality such as loss of virture or sinking in vice; the third one is the spiritual

meaning, which expresses the complete extinction of suffering.[15]

Meaning beneath meaning

In Buddhadasa's sermons, he often mentions the "essence" of meaning. It is true that sometimes explanations or definitions do not clearly state the essence of things or events. Although there are many ways to express the essence of things, frequently, in profound dhamma, the "essence" is not directly perceived from the general literal explanation. It is likened to a visual experience of waves which are in motion but beneath which is stillness (the waters are still non- motion). Thus the meaning of what is directly observed does not lie in the observed. Beneath the commom meaning of everyday language is another layer of meaning which constitutes the essence of the message.[16]

Change in the meaning

Buddhadasa notes that the meaning of religious language can be transformed from time to time or with geography, and social conditions. For example, the word "nibbana" existed in many religions in India both before, and at the time of Buddha, but its intended meaning was not the same as in Buddhism. The meaning of "nibbana" was developed through the progress of spiritual innovation.[17]Thus the meaning of religious words can be uncertain even in a dictionary.

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15 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Etappaccayata* (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1973), p. 198.

16 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Kaay Thammabudr* [Dhamma Successor Camp], (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1975), p. 173.

17 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Patipata Paritat* [Practice Review]. (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1976), p. 225.

The similarity of a contrary meaning

According to Buddhadasa the difference between things can be determined by various factors including contrary meanings. He remarks that the opposite meaning of dualism is valid only in the ordinary language such as gain and lose, good and bad, happiness and suffering. But in dhamma language this is not so. Differentiation and dichotomies are human formulations. Nature recognizes no boundaries and no division. Thus contrary meanings at the everyday language can be insignificant at the dhamma level.[18] For example, saying like "heaven is hell", "death before death", or "laughing is crying" are dhamma expression which have special meanings. More importantly, they are in contrast to the meaning of ordinary language. Buddhadasa points out that these paradoxies cause one of the most arduous problems in interpreting the doctrine.

Inexpressible meaning

Buddhadasa often insists that there are many profound aspects of meaning of the doctrine which cannot be exhaustively expressed because they are so abstract that they defy human description.[19] He suggests that the more we talk about the profound meaning of doctrine the more incomprehensible it. Zen say the same thing, what is Zen? and what people can answer is still not Zen. Such is the difficulty of grasping and expressing all the meaning of the teachings.

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18 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Sawan nanlae kua Narok* [It is Heaven that is Hall], (Bangkok: Dhammabucha, 1973), p. 9.

19 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Obroom Phra Thammatut* [Training Dhamma for Mission]. 1969, p. 28.

Problems on the Level of Translation

Another crucial problem in interpreting Buddhist teachings rests on the problem of translation into other languages particularly from Pali, an ancient Indian language, to Thai. He indicates that in dhamma the literal meaning of words cannot be taken as a definite determining factor. The "essence" has to be the basis of meaning. From this standpoint it can be said that Buddhadasa rejects a word for word translation of the doctrine which is at present the only one approach of translation existing in Thai tradition today.

Buddhadasas comments that Buddhist scholars who worked with Pali texts commit themselves to the literal meaning of the words in a dictionary. Their understanding of the doctrine seem to be limited to the definition of words; what goes beyond than literal translation are not comprehended. Therefore, they hardly realize the existence of the other different mode of meaning which is hidden. Thus every translation from the original language to another language encounters many dangers of refering to unsuitable meanings. Consequently, there is no chance to interpret the doctrine from the second language into the daily life for ordinary people while preserving the essence of the doctrine.

Moreover, Buddhadasa points to the fact that Buddhist teaching was an oral tradition for many hundred years before it was written down in the form of Buddhist Scripture. Then it was continually transcribed for more than 2000 years. Therefore taking the literal meaning of a word as a decisive factor can simply lead to a misinterpretation of the whole set of doctrines.

Buddhadasa insists firmly on the significance of comprehending the meaning of language because according to him understanding the meaning of language influences the way people interpret the world and, to an extent, it shapes their perception of reality. All of his writings and preachings are attempts to communicate and express the meaning of religious language. At the same time he stresses that the profound meaning of doctrine cannot be attained only through understanding the language. Terms are borrowed from ordinary language and are given new meanings which attempt to provide some general guidance. For

Buddhadasa, dhamma is not something that can be transmitted in words but must be discovered for oneself.

Buddhism, according to Buddhadasa, is not found in the Tipitaka, manuals, nor in rites and rituals. It is a way of life or a system of practice. It is to be lived and not only to be studied. Enlightenment can be attained without literacy or studying the Tipitaka.[20] Dhamma does not exist in any scriptures but in life.[21] This involves concientious conduct and doing one's duty in everyday life. The search for adequate standards of action, is at the same time a search for personal maturity and social relevance. The answers to religious questions can be sought in various spheres of secular art and thought. That is, understanding the true value of life helps man realize and take responsibility for his own fate. This is actually learning and practising dhamma in itself. Understanding the truth of life means obtaining the ultimate goal of Buddhism (nibbana) without having to know the Tipitaka or what they are getting is called. [22] This realization leads him to the process of the simplification of the whole set of the doctrine so that it may be realized by everyone here and now.

We can thus see the perspective from which Buddhadasa blends Buddhist teaching with everyday life. He does not attempt to point out any social aspect of Buddhist teaching but demonstrates that an understanding of the broader sphere of life reveals a central social dimension.

The Consequence of Misinterpretation

Personal Religious Life

Buddhadasa strongly asserts that so long as the Buddhist doctrine is not interpreted in terms of dhamma language there is not only no opportunity to amalgamate the whole set of Buddhist doctrine to everyday life but also the perception of teaching must be based on faith

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20 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Patipata Paritat*. 1976, p. 216.

21 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Obroom Phra Thammatut* [Training Dhamma for Mission]. 1969, pp. 26-27

22 Ibid., pp. 216-220.

because only at the level of dhamma language the meaning of teaching can be expressed independently from "faith". People can thus gain and experience the teachings for themselves at any moment in their daily lives. For example, heaven and hell in everyday language are realms which can be experienced only after death. Most people spend large amounts in merit making in order to be able to enter heaven. But in dhamma language heaven and hell refer to happiness and suffering in the present life. Thus they are to be found in everyone's own mind and may be experienced any time at all.

Further, Buddhadasa notes that when the spiritual meaning of the doctrine is not explained, the real purpose of the teaching can not be known. People are then led to expect something different from what Buddhism can actually offer. Buddhadasa points out the example of the majority of Thai Buddhists who do not understand the aim of merit making, thus they make merit and expect something in return in the form of rewards such as fortunes, happiness in this life and the next life. Frequently they hope to get back a thousand times more than what they give. They are acquainted only with how to get and how to take. It is the religion of getting and taking. That is not Buddhism. The giving in order to wipe out selfishness, for them, is incomprehensible. Therefore, such people are not successful in religious life. They cannot gain fully from Buddhism in their daily lives because they do not know its spiritual meaning.

Moreover, Buddhadasa observes that the result of the separation of the doctrine between monks and laymen is that the teaching cannot be illustrated in terms of spiritual meaning. The high level of dhamma or Lokutra (supramundane) is for monks and the low level or Lokiya (mundane) is for householders.[23] For example "nibbana" in traditional interpretation is understood as a mirage city or a place where one's every wish is fullfiled. It presents another reality too "far away" from the practical needs of man's daily life. Particularly, it seems to be inaccessible for the householders in this life. Therefore, nibbana has been considered to be the subject of study for monks. Ordinary people should satisfy themselves by performing the moral precepts (five Sila), merit making and rituals. For Buddhadasa, nibbana in dhamma language can be realized by everyone here and now, and

23 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Tua-ku Khong-ku* [I-Mine], (Bangkok: Suwichan, 1962), p. 8.

refers to a state of mind free from unsatisfactory conditions. Any time that one is free from defilment (greed, hatred, and delusion) produce problems, unsatisfactoriness, or suffering. Nibbana appears in mind. If one attains the truth of life, then his state of mind contains peace and wisdom. There is no suffering at all. The nibbana state is permanent.

Religious Levels

In Buddhadasa's view religious practice without an understanding of its real meaning simply becomes a ritual which leads to a rise in what he calls "absurdity". Buddhism was increasingly mixed up with non-Buddhist elements. After a long period ritual assumes a more important role and increasingly encloses the primary form of Buddhism thus obscuring the essence of Buddhism. The real purpose of Buddhism is gradually changed and substituted. People hold Buddhism in a new view by taking visible external forms such as rituals or religious leaders. Once Buddhism looses its spiritual meaning it is no longer alive.

Buddhadasa gives the example of Buddhism's disappearance from India, which is often explained by reference to a lack of laymen organizations, the expansion of Islam, and the destruction of Buddhist monastic life. For Buddhadasa, these reasons are invalid because they are incapable of destroying the core of Buddhism. He points out that the misinterpretation of the doctrine is the real cause of the extinction of Buddhism in India. What Buddhadasa means is that the people were not provided with explanations of the important doctrine in the Buddhist sense, instead in the Hindu perspective.

For example, under the explanation about the cycle of birth and rebirth in terms of reincarnation, according to Buddhadasa, there is no Buddhism in India.[24] He also states that historical evidence tells us that the core of Buddhist doctrine has been explained by Hindu concept for more than 2000 years.[25] The third council of Buddhism in B.E.300 (B.C.200) reflects this problem. Up to now it is clear that, for Buddhadasa, misinterpretation of the

24 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Upasak Nai Karn Kao-chai Tham* [The Obstacle of Understanding of the Dhamma], (Samutparkarn: The Buddhist Reform Organization, no year), p. 44.

25 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Paticcasamuppada kua Arai*? [What is Paticcasamuppada?], (Bangkok: Dhammabucha, 1971, p. 57-60.

doctrine is one of the main cause of historical events.

Buddhadasa regards the divergence of religion into various sects or denominations including conflict between religions, as caused by a failure to recognize the "inner" meaning or the spirit of doctrine since only outer forms are being taken into account and practice. Therefore, people have no opportunity to understand or have no access to the core of their own religions, although they may hold some aspects of doctrine or rituals that seemingly manifest their understanding and grasp of the principle of the doctrine. The importance given to the different expressions of the meaning of doctrine compound religious conflicts. Eventually there is a split into different denomenations and so religion itself becomes a divisive element in social life. This reality shows how religion fails in its actual purpose of fostering peace, understanding, and worldwide cooperation among human beings.

Social Level

It is interesting to note that Buddhadasa applies two levels of meaning not only in connection with religion but also in other spheres of human life. That is, the two categories of meaning can be used to refer to two distinct levels of the meaning of things.

Buddhadasa points out the significance of understanding the two levels of meaning of things. Knowing only the ordinary meaning of things is insufficient to help people understand life, society, and the world as they really are because it is only one side of things. He insists that the understanding of the two levels of meaning of things leads people to see the fundamental interrelatedness of things which generates a broader world view. This is necessary to achieve a fulfilling personal and social life. To appreciate an "inner" meaning Buddhadasa asks everybody to pay attention to and experience everyday events carefully and contemplatively in order to realize the true value of life and the real meaning of things in relation to life.[26] He notes that there is no other danger greater than the misunderstanding of things that is understood as correct. Man's incorrect view is what destroys him. Therefore,

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26 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Singtee Chao Lok Kaard Klan* [What the People of the World Lack]. (Chiang Mai: Buddha Nikhom, 1967), p. 15.

one should not rush to grasp and perceive only the superficial meaning.

From this point Buddhadasa goes further to consider the manifestation of the problem on the level of society and in such spheres as politics, peace, and war. With regard to politics, he understands it as intimately related to the variation of language meanings. That is, the meaning of politics varies with with individual politicians who define politics, justice or even peace according to the special interests derived for their groups and their countries. The world, notes Buddhadasa, cannot attain peace when people do not understand the profound meaning of politics and peace. He observes that an insufficient understanding of the nature of peace and politics leads to war. Politics, for him, should not be anything other than a factor for peace or moral realization in order to help people live together peacefully. For Buddhadasa, understanding the two levels of meaning of one's life is an essential basis for the solution of problems at the level of the individual, the society and the world.

Buddhadasa and Criticism of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand

It appears that in general, Buddhadasa is critical of anything standing in the way of the fulfillment of the primary soterriological purpose of religion. His work is not limited at a broadside attack on traditional interpretations of Buddhist teaching, but also includes the criticism of various components of Thai Buddhist tradition. He opines that Buddhism has to be dynamic since once it becomes a sterile system it will lose its vitality. Buddhadasa's criticism of Thai Buddhism is a part of his attempt to return to original Buddhism. Further, it can lead us to a better understanding of the religious situation in Thailand.

Traditional Scriptures

From the doctrinal point of view the brunt of Buddhadasa's attack is directed toward Buddhaghosa, one of the greatest Buddhist commentators in the 5th century A.D., who is most acclaimed for providing a commentary and interpretative structure for the Theravada tradition, and the scholastism of the Abhidhamma. Buddsadasa observes that in Thailand various scriptural commentaries which were later completed replaced the original Pali Text as

a source of religious authority, especially Visuddhimagga (the Path of Purity), a classical scriptural commentary of Buddhaghosa which is one of the most important texts of Buddhist study in Thailand. He declares that Visudhimagga is one of the oldest historical evidence showing gradual use of Hindu concepts in interpreting Buddhist teachings.

Buddhadasa illustrates this argument through historical evidence, such as Buddha's Own Word, the Suttas in the Tipitaka. In his book he wrote the title "What is Paticcasam-uppada" (1971) showing the distinction between what he considers the interpretation of Buddhist teaching using Hindu concepts and in the Buddhist sense. He is convinced that uncritical adherence to the Buddhaghosa orthodoxy has obscured a real encounter with the Buddha's dhamma. The criticism of Visuddhimagga implies that Buddhadasa goes against the belief and understanding of not only most Thai Buddhists but also Buddhists in general. Consequently, he is condemned by some groups of monks and laymen as an ungreatful and heretical person who destroys Buddhism.[27] On the other hand, his book has became an important reference which most of Buddhist students have to take into consideration.

Buddhadasa does not stop there, he does what nobody has dared to do, that is, he criticizes the Abhidhamma Pitaka, one of the cardinal tripartie scriptures in the Tipitaka: Abhidhamma, Sutta, and Vinaya Pitaka. It is a fact that most of Thai Buddhist students believe that Abhidhamma is the Buddha's Own Word. They prefer to study this more carefully than the other two scriptures (Sutta and Vinaya), especially since World War II, when the Burmese tradition of studying and practicing Buddhism was introduced into Thailand. Buddhadasa insists that Abhidhamma was completed about 1300 years after the death of Buddha. He further criticizes that a large part of Abhidhamma is not only in line with Buddha's dhamma but it is also antithetical to the profound Buddhist teaching.[28]

"What is Abhidhamma" (1971), is one of Buddhadasa's important research works which refers to many sources of evidence taken from the Tipitaka, including the existing

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27 Suan Usom Foundation, ed., *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh*. Bangkok: Suan Usom Foundation, 1982, p. 113.

28 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Aphetham Kau Arai* [What is Abhidhamma], (Bangkok: Dhammabucha 1974), pp. 73-74.

opinion of both eastern and western Buddhist scholars like Phra Nanatilaka (a German monk), Professor T.W Rhys Davids, who established the Pali-Text Society in London, and Hary Singh Gour, a well-known Indian scholar. His book is regarded as the most important operation on the Thai Theravada Buddhism. As a result of this criticism, Buddhadasa is opposed by some conservative monks and laymen. He is accused of being a great sinner, as daring to criticize the Abhidhamma Pitaka as wrong. However, the Abhidhamma Pitaka has been discredited in the view of many monks and laymen. The prestige of the Abhidhamma has been affected immensely ever since.

Buddhadasa also criticizes the Buddhologists including most eastern and western scholars who write about Buddhism because he feels that their writings contain many non-Buddhist concepts. They generally use Hindu concepts to explain Buddhism, especially the concepts of kamma, birth and rebirth.[29] He acknowledges that it is very difficult to clearly distinguish between Buddhist and Hindu concept through only literal study of doctrine or historical evidences. This is because one of the most difficult points centres on the application of the same word which carries completely different meanings and goals: one meaning (the meaning in Hindu sense) maintaining the "self" or attachment to "self"; whereas another meaning (the meaning in Buddhism) maintains "non-self" and demolishing the idea of "self". This point, for Buddhadasa, is a border line between Buddhist and Hindu conception.[30]

Education of Thai Sangha

Buddhadasa criticizes the education of Thai Sangha as superficial. He points out that the success of Thai Sangha educational institutions is generally measured by the number of such institutions in the cities and the rural areas and the number of monks (today reaching a total of hundreds of thousands). This, however, is not a true indication of the level of success because when the quality of education and the actual dissemination to foreign countries is considered, the Thai Sangha falls short of its goal of promoting Buddhist teaching. For example, Buddhadasa states that the study of Buddhism of the Thai Sangha, still emphasizes

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29 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Tua-ku Khong-ku* [I-Mine], 1962, pp. 72-74.

30 Ibid., pp. 7-8, 72.

many traditional-scriptural commentaries to serve as the main text and disregards the original texts like the Tipitaka. For Buddhadasa, it is aggravating to see how Buddhist students trust and devote their lives to these commentaries without ever examining their correctness and applicability. They do not acquire the critical awareness necessary to go beyond these commentaries.

Additionally, Buddhadasa notes that the Buddhist educational system of the Thai Sangha focuses mainly on the study of the Pali language using the traditional Pali commentaries in order that the self study of the Tipitaka after finishing formal education is assured. He observes that in reality, after finishing the education, most students pay no attention to the Tipitaka. Thus, the Buddhist knowledge of monks is still at the level of the traditional commentary. Consequently, the general laymen's understanding of Buddhism which is derived from monks, is no better than the Buddhist legends in commentary. Buddhadasa opines that the Thai Sangha lacks intellectual scholars who devote their lives to Buddhism. Therefore, there are only traditional monks. Buddhadasa observes that if the Thai Sangha continues to pursue this educational system, Thai Buddhism will not prosper and expand.

In his comparative observation of Thai Buddhism with Buddhism in Japan, Sri Lanka and Burma, Buddhadasa sees that there are monks in these countries who truly devote their lives to a profound study of Buddhism. These Buddhist scholars, including Lama monks in Tibet, have written Buddhist texts in English for different people around the world. Buddhism has expanded worldwide because of their works. Buddhadasa asks whether Thailand has scholars like these. Moreover, Japan has the most number of young Buddhist associations with Buddhist students working for worldwide dissemination of Buddhism. But in Thailand such activities are not initiat. He said that if the reason why it is not done is a lack of fluency in the English language, this is still excusable; but if the reason lies in insufficient knowledge of Buddhism then this is backwardness and therefore inexcuable.[31]

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31 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Chum-num Kor-kit Idsara* (A Miscellany of Teaching). Bangkok: Klangwittaya, 1968.

Thai Sangha's Way of Living

Buddhadasa's articles show that he is not satisfied with the Thai Sangha's way of living. In Buddhadasa's view the Sangha is preoccupied with prestige, position, and comfort and they have little interest in the highest ideals of Buddhism. Most of the monks are more concerned with building new temples and governing the Sangha hierachy than teaching the dhamma to the people. He strongly criticizes those monks who practice the magical art of fortune-telling or soothsaying for their own ends and he looks askance at a mechanistic use of merit-making and rituals that aim for the attainment of an immediate reward. Buddhist teaching is then capitalized for fortune and status. The strict monastic disciplines are diverted for prestige and fame and so Buddhism becomes a vehicle for worldly security. Most monks look at their education as a means to get an educational degree and build a career in the Sangha hierachy; they do not aim at practicing for attainment of nibbana. They busy themselves with governing the younger monks who are provided with Buddhist education instead of a deep formation according to Buddhist principles.

Buddhadasa sees the problem of the deviated behaviors of the Sangha from the monastic disciplines can be solved if dhamma practice in accordance with the dhamma-vinaya is earnestly promoted. At the same time he requests that laymen can also be of great help if they would selectively support only those monks who really practice and follow the dhamma-vinaya and critize those who deviate. He points out that the actual power that controls the monks is the people who provide for their four basic needs. Senior monks do not have so much power as people. Patronage of monks by the Sangha and the government will be meaningless if it is not backed by the people. Thus, if people see that any of the monks' behavior is not in line with dhamma-vinaya, they can stop supporting them. This is actually a private way of controlling monk's way of living.

Buddhadasa states that criticism and protestation for righteous construction does not contradict Buddhist principle since all of the monastic disciplines of Buddhist monks (227 disciplines) resulted from the people's criticism of the monks, or the monks criticism of

themselves.[32]

Religious Dissemination and Government Policy

Buddhadasa does not agree with the government policy of propagation of Buddhism. He criticizes that the government asks the Sangha to teach and train the people to refrain from gambling, smoking, drinking, and all kinds of addictions including avoidance of obsessive sensual pleasures. But at the same time, the government allows the opening of nightclubs, sensual entertainment places, taverns, and tabacco factories in order to collect taxes from such businesses. Buddhadasa once said sarcastically that it was ridiculous that the government asked the Sangha to work against the government. If the government did all these unknowingly it could be regarded as carelessness and absurd. But if it did so in spite of knowing what it was doing, then it had to be said that the government was intentionally foolish.[33]

Buddhism from a New Perspective

Having discussed the concept of Buddhadasa's interpretation and his criticism of Thai Buddhism, we are now in a position to examine Buddhadasa's teachings which will not only allow for a deeper understanding of a new perspective of Buddhist interpretation but will answer why Buddhadasa's teachings are perceived to be very concrete, and why they are seen as efficaciously fusing Buddhist teachings to the everyday concerns of the ordinary man. A systematic critique of the whole set of Buddhadasa's teachings, ideas and statements is beyond the scope of this study. A critique of Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism has already been done by Gabaude (1979) and Jackson (1988) in their respective exhaustive studies.[34] This section will only focus on some selections from Buddhadasa's writings which

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32 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Chum-num Kor-kit Idsara* [A Miscellany of Teaching], 1968, pp. 303-304.

33 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Obroom Phra Thammathut* [Training Monks for Mission], 1971, pp. 139-140.

34 See Gabaude, Louis, *Introduction a l'hermeneutique de Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*. unpublished Ph.D thesis, La Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III, 1979. Jackson, Peter A., *A Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World*. Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1988.

have been cited by followers as having an influence on shaping their lives. These teachings can be illustrated in the way Buddhadasa discusses nibbana, work, and kamma.

Nibbana: the Ultimate Goal of Buddhism

Thai Traditional View of Nibbana

For the majority of Thai Buddhists nibbana is a state attained after death. It is often understood as the city of immortality -a place abounding in all sorts of good things, a place where one's every wish is fullfilled and everything one wants is immediately available.[35] Yet, nibbana is also generally seen as a goal far removed from the lay context. It is extremely difficult to attain nibbana in this life -the ordinary man must accumulate merits for many thousands of rebirths in the future before he can attain nibbana. Some people, moreover, regard not only nibbana as the anihilation of the whole material existence, but believe that the attainment of nibbana is beyond the reach of the laity, so it would be senseless to seek it. Only monks living in the forest may have any hope of achieving nibbana.[36] Significantly, this belief is even held by many monks at temples. At the same time, the concept of nibbana has been outside the realm of debate in traditional Thai Buddhism. The term nibbana itself is also often seen as a special sacred word, it is forbidden to discuss its nature -no one dares to think or speak of it easyly.[37] Not only laymen but monks, have not questioned the meaning of nibbana in the belief that a plausible explanation of the term is not possible.

Buddhadasa's Interpretation of Nibbana

In contrast to the traditional Buddhist view of nibbana, Buddhadasa's conception is fundamentally world affirming. Buddhadasa argues that the traditional interpretation of nibbana is the meaning of everyday language. Nibbana in its spiritual meaning refers only to

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35 Swearer: 1971, p. 64.

36 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Nippaan Tee Nee Lae Deav Nae* [Nibbana is Here and Now], (Bangkok: Dhammabucha, 1971), pp. 59-72.

37 Pun Chongprasert, *Arai Thuk Arai Phit* [What is Correct and What is Wrong], (Samutprakarn: Buddhist Reform Organization, 1982), p. 20.

this life and is open to all. It is not outside us as a place but inside us as internal state and experience attainable by man in this present existence. It is the natural state of freed-mind which everyone can experience by himself here and now.[38] The activity in the material world is a positive part of the religious effort to attain spiritual salvation. He emphasizes that there is no relation between nibbana and an after-death. Buddha himself attained nibbana before his death. Moreover, in the Tipitaka there is no account of nibbana after death. Through the concept of dhamma language Buddhadasa's interpretation of nibbana illustrates how the path of nibbana can be attained from the position of being an individual living in contemporary society. His concern for demystifying nibbana is partly reflected in his efforts to explain the meanings of the word "nibbana".

Meanings of the Word Nibbana

According to Buddhadasa, nibbana is an ordinary word used in a general way in Indian daily life, to indicate something becoming cool, something rendered harmless. It is used in reference to humans, animals, and inanimate objects. For example, a burning charcoal that has cooled down is called charcoal nibbana; a wild animal that has been tamed and is no longer dangerous is called nibbana.[39] Nibbana applied to man means coolness of the mind. Buddhadasa also points out that the term nibbana has not only been used in Buddhism but in many different sects and religions, both before and during the time of Buddha. The meaning accorded to the term, however, has been different for the various religious groups. For instance, in some sects, namely Kamasukhallikanuyoga, total absorbtion in sensuality is considered nibbana (sexual need is a hot state which cools down when satisfied); while in other sects nibbana is identified with deep concentration.[40] In Buddhism, according to Buddhadasa, nibbana refers to the absolute extinction of every kind of defilements (kilasa); the state of a free mind resulting from the complete elimination of the idea of self. This mental

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38 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Thamma samrub Nuk Suksa* [Buddha-Dhamma for Student], (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1969), pp. 30-32.

39 Ibid., p. 32.

40 Suan Usom Foundation: 1982, p. 520.

state is refered to as the ultimate coolness of mind.[41]

Nibbana: an Internal State Exists in Every Life

The most important result of Buddhadasa's contradictory view of nibbana as compared with the basic of traditional interpretation is that nibbana (coolness or normality of the mind) exists in everybody as a spiritual foundation at a certain level. It comes along with life and nurtures life to exist normally. He points out that nibbana can be attained at any moment that the mind becomes free from defilements (greed, hatred, and delusion) which cloud the mind with a sense of dissatisfaction or suffering (dukkha).[42] It is not a supernatural condition but is the spiritual practice based on the principle of causality realized by Buddha. If one acts rightly through understanding this principle, it is going to the path of nibbana. Buddhadasa does not equate nibbana with the purified mind but with a state occurring in the mind when it is pure.[43]

For Buddhadasa, freedom from defilement, at any moment, is temporary nibbana. Permanent cessation of defilement is perfect nibbana. People who experience the occasional freed-mind have tasted true nibbana, even momentarily. He also notes that the mind is basically peaceful but that defilements appear once in a while, thus tarnishing and causing the mind to lose its balance periodically. Being aware of this fact, individuals can perform correct practice that will enable them to extinguish suffering. Significantly, these practices are not equated with the imposition of burdens or even with temple visit requirements. It requires neither the special learning of the scripture or meditative practice.[44] This, however, does not imply that Buddhadasa denies a rigorous ascetic life or the systematic Buddhist meditation,

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41 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Thamma samrub Nuk Suksa* [Buddha-Dhamma for Student], 1969, p. 32.

42 In Buddhist sense, suffering may be understood as any condition of life which is unpleasant, depressing, and difficult to bear, always contrary, causing problems, unsatisfaction, bodily and mental pain and sorrow, and always found in life -more specifically, in birth, old age, sickness, death, -in getting what one dislikes, in separation from (or losing) what one likes, and not getting what one desires. All these constitute suffering (dukkha). Pongsapitch, Amara, and others, *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*. Bangkok: no press, 1985, p. 26.

43 Buddhadasa, *Lak Puttasasana* [Principles of Buddhism], (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1968), p. 286.

44 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Thamma samrub Nuk Suksa* [Buddha-Dhamma for Student], 1969, p. 39.

saying that few men are able to renounce the world to lead a strict religious life. At the same time, Buddhadasa does not entirely ignore scriptural study. He often uses classical texts as the basis of his teachings. However, he noted that if one studies the Tipitaka and does not realize its spiritual meaning, it is not Buddha-dhamma.

Nibbana in Everyday Life

According to Buddhadasa, attainment of nibbana is compatible with worldly involvement. Everyone can reach the goal by performing their everyday duties with a hightened sense of awareness. When one carries out every step of life with constant awareness its very essence will appear in his mind. If one lives in such a way, there is no way defilements appear in the mind because one has given up habits that allow them to arise. Living like this is the way to eliminate defilement which is known as living rightly.[45] Buddhadasa notes that defilements (kilasa) which pollute the mind have no essential existence but, like all other things exist dependently and when the conditions that permit them arise (the absence of mindfulness) is controlled, they have no chance to arise.

The mind, moreover, can be progressively freed from defilements in degree, and the individual can reach absolute freedom (nibbana) once the mind is completely freed from the threat of defilements. That is nibbana in which everyone should be interested, stated Buddhadasa. It is a natural way to extinguish suffering which everyone can practice according to their own ability -both monks and laymen.[46] It can apply to every area of activity and every aspect of life. The path to nibbana, for Buddhadasa, is not any kind of withdrawal from the world but at the midst of worldly activity.

Buddhadasa also argues that the separation of dhamma into those practised by monks for attaining nibbana and those by laymen who make their living in the world, is extremely wrong. They must be the same thing because the sufferings and defilements are the same. There is no difference between them. The attainment of nibbana transcends laity and

45 Ibid., p. 36.

46 Ibid., p. 38.

monkhood alike.[47] He saw, moreover, the layman's life is loaded with burdens and has more disturbing problems than monks who live in the temples or the forests. The laity are in greater need of nibbana to quench the suffering in daily life than monks. However, Buddhadasa does not reject the role of the monk but what he rejects is the traditional barrier between monks and laity.

Up to this point, it is clear that Buddhadasa makes no distinction between spiritual activity and material world. Nibbana is readily accessible to both monks and laymen. Through the broadest perspective of his interpretation of nibbana, religious and secular motivations are completly merged and inseparable.

Buddhadasa does not stop at this point, he pushes this insight to the ultimate limit by espousing the contemporariness of nibbana and suffering. In other words, Buddhadasa places nibbana within the very social world which is suffering and the cessation of suffering (nibbana) exists not only within each other but exists within our living body.[48] At any moment when sufferings arise one can find the key to cessation of suffering. He advises people not to go busily searching for nibbana in the monastery or in the forest because the cessation of suffering exists within suffering: the greatest coolness is gained through the greatest heat quenched.

Finally, Buddhadasa criticizes those Buddhists who believe that the attainment of nibbana is beyond their abilities not only for their ignorance of their religion but also for their ignorance of their own nature. These people, Buddhadasa argues, go through life without realizing the nibbana dimension that is closely associated with life itself and which helps them to lead normal lives. This misunderstanding prevents them to adopt what already exists in life to apply most beneficially for themselves.[49]

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47 Ibid., p. 39.

48 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Nai Samsara mee Nippaan* [In Samsara Exists Nibbana], (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1970), p.2.

49 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Nippaan Tee Nee Lae Deav Nae* [Nibbana is Here and Now], (Bangkok: Dhammabucha, 1972), p. 72.

Work

One of the most striking features of Buddhadasa's interpretation is the concept of work. Buddhadasa raises work to a very important place and it is made somewhat inseparable from religious life. It is through work in the world, that dhamma is best expressed. Work and dhamma practice are not really two but one. Each position is an aspect of the truth. Through the conception of dhamma language, salvation and work come to be linked. Buddhadasa united them in a practical and simple teaching. Working for the sake of work has become the very sign of nibbana. Buddhadasa's idea of work made important advances with respect to the religious regulation of everyday life.

What is Work?

Buddhadasa saw that people generally know "work" only in a limited aspect. They know of its value no more than earning a living. For Buddhadasa "work" has a special meaning. All living things can exist through action and progress of action. The progress in the action is life and what makes the progress of life all the time is work. Work is the real entity of life.[50]

According to Buddhadasa, life survives through responsibility for work, consciously and subconciously. What is required for the survival of life is inherent in all kinds of living things: a part is in the form of instincts and the other depends on learning and studying. Work is essential for all types of livings. It is the ultimate thing that helps human beings and society survive. The meaning of work, according to Buddhadasa, has two levels: one is to survive, or what makes life survive, another is an essential thing for maintaining the society. Buddhadasa mentions the Pali words bearing the meaning of work: kammanto, kicca, and ajivo.[51]

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50 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Ngang Kau Arai* [What is work?], (Surat Thani: Ratanamesri, 1987), pp. 11-14.

51 Ibid., p.7,8, 20.
Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Mokkhadhamma Prayuk* (Chaiya :Dhammadhana Foundation, 1987), p. 541.

Kammanto	means the last thing absolutely unexemptable from being done
Kicca	means the working duty.
Ajivo	means the maintenance of life.

He points out that not only all these three words bear the meanings focused on what must be done and cannot be exempted but also "work" is dhamma in the third meaning, that is the duty. Buddhadasa praises work of all kinds. The great stress which he places on work when he said "work is an honorable thing, being supreme as the most essential thing which saves man and world".[52] Work, for Budhadasa, is not only an end in itself but a part of society.

Working is Practicing Dhamma

Buddhadasa gave a further insight into the concept of work when he interpreted work as a spiritual activity in everyday life. His view of work as integrated with the religious life is shown by his remark that working and practicing dhamma cannot be separated, they are one and the same thing. Nobody observes and realizes working as an opportunity to practice dhamma. On the contrary, people separate them absolutely. He points out that working in itself teachs everything. It illustrates the truth of life, depending on how cleverly we perceive. It gives knowledge and trains us with principle (sila), concentration (samadhi), and wisdom (panya) from the fundamental level to the end. That is, working is not simply necessary for the material world but also for the progress of spiritual life. There is no other bridge but work.

Moreover, Buddhadasa indicated that several items of dhamma are immediately practiced when people are working or completing their duties in daily life. They must possess dhamma of all types and levels even without realizing it. For example, when a person has the will to do something (sacca), pleasure at working (chanda), control of oneself in working (dama), endurance and perseverance (khanti), industriousness (viriya), attention to the work (chitta), prudence and consideration (vimansa), solution of the problem in working (caga),

52 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *What is Work?*: 1987, p. 31-32.

and wisdom (panya), etc.[53] Such dhamma principles, according to Buddhadasa, are the ones people generally practice in their daily life to achieve what has to be done. There are no ways by which working can be separated from dhamma. Nobody can achieve any work without dhamma in it.[54] He insisted that the path to nibbana (the Noble Eightfold Path) and the essence for enlightenment (the Seven Bojjhangas) hold the same principle as the daily practice of people in general. There is nothing different in both context and principle. This is the way that Buddhadasa merges the central tenet of Buddhism into the world of everyday life, while also imbuing worldly activity with religious quality.

For Buddhadasa, there is no aspect of human activity as being indifferent to the achievement of the highest end of life. Work of all kinds and levels is dhamma: a farmer working in the rice-field is practicing dhamma of farmers, a laborer doing his work is practicing dhamma of labor. With such working the poor will transcend poverty and become well-to-do. Everybody can see by himself that work is really the supreme thing which saves them from all problems. Ironically, Buddhadasa said that in the rice field where farmers are working and sweating exists dhamma more than in a chapel performing a religious ceremony.

Working for the Sake of Work is the Path to Nibbana

Buddhadasa takes his unconventional interpretation one step further when he points out that working can provide laymen with direct access to nibbana. That is, the conscious development of mindfulness (sati) is interpreted as being integral to activity and work in daily life. He states that all work or everyday duties performed with awareness are regarded as having the same path to nibbana. No work which is considered trivial or low even keeping the body in a fit and clean condition such as eating, sleeping, excreting, and playing.[55] All are

53 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Paramatadhamma* [The highest level of the dhamma Vol.I]. (Chaiya: Dhammadhana Foundation, 1970), p. 278.

54 Suan Usom Foundation, *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh Vol.II*: 1982, p. 38.

55 Buddhadasa gives an example for more detail explanation on this topic that when we are hungry, we eat; when the weather is hot, we escape it by going into a shade or taking a bath, all these are works because it is a duty of man to his physical life in order to relieve what is hard to endure to keep the physical suffering away.

work because they are important things for life.[56] They must be done with most care, and prudence. Lack of awareness while working is regarded as wholly bankrupting and damaging, since it is not possible to enter the path of nibbana. The attainment of the salvation is based on constant mindfulness and awareness in order to prevent the birth of greed, hate, ignorance, and selfishness (the birth of idea of self or defilement). This is the way to extinction of suffering (nibbana).

It is clear from the above that the basis of Buddhadasa's notion of work is the non-self-centred activity which he interpreted as a means for attainment to nibbana. Buddhadasa noted that the remarkable difference between working with the aim of practicing dhamma and working without such aim. The latter can become the cause of egoism, defilments, or even exploitation of others, whereas the former can become a means for eliminating selfishness. Buddhadasa calls this "working for the sake of work".

Working is Happiness in Itself

Buddhadasa noted that working for the benefit of work is the foundation for eliminating selfishness in all forms. Its essence is, working with the freest mind, awareness, and wisdom. Work would become a primary volitional content in attitude, and an enjoyable matter. For example, a farmer who realized the importance of working as the human duty or the supreme thing which can save him survive. He would be pleased with his rice farming from the beginning. Though the work is hard it will not become the cause of his suffering. When he digs the ground he is contented with the result of each digging. The pleasure and contentment in the result of the first digging is the motive for the second digging, and the process is repeated until he finishes his work. Having pleasure as the motive is the nourishment of the mind. He can work more and more. He is happy every time he works, having self-contentment and self-respect. Work in itself becomes an instrument to eradicate selfishness. This is the practicing of dhamma in working. People need not to go to the temple or receive any sermons because it is already there entirely in the work done. Buddhadasa saw

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56 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Tam Ngan Pua Ngan* [Working for the Sake of Work]. (Bangkok: Dhammabucha, 1979), p. 13.

that working is the whole deed, the deed for the progress of physical and spiritual life.[57] Working for the sake of work does not harm oneself and others from the beginning to the end.

In contrast, working for money, family, or even for religion is inferior because the ego and the sense of possession still exists. It is not the work for wiping out selfishness. In some sense, it implies the separation of work from life. People are pleased and happy only when they receive the expected benefit or honor. There must be worry, fear, strong desire, some compelling necessity, egoistic feeling, or waiting while working or as long as they have not achieved the expected result. Working could become a heavy burden, a deluding and disenchanting thing or even suffering. In deed, these feeling are the initial cause of the problem in working.

Buddhadasa noted that working for the sake of work is pure sacrifice. It is beneficial for oneself as well as others. Such practice of dhamma can be done by everybody everywhere and it is honored equally. In the sense of sacrifice, all kinds of works are equal in value.[58]

As for the result from the work received in the form of money, praise, or even public benefit, Buddhadasa regards them as by-products of work because they are insignificant when compared with the spiritual and intellectual development through working. What we have in mind is Buddhadasa's interpretation of work which illustrates the gearing of social and religious thinking. Work as a means of fulfilling one's duty comes to be valued as an end in itself. It would be most interesting to analyse whether or not Buddhadasa's idea of work has any direct influence on economic value.

Kamma and Its Result

Traditional Belief in Kamma

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57 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Paramatadhamma Vol.I*, (Chaiya: Dhammadhana Foundation, 1970), p. 284.

58 Suan Usom Foundation, *Fifty years Suan Mokkh Vol. II*: 1982, p. 106.

Kamma (intentional action), according to the majority of Buddhists in Thailand is evil deeds, bad luck, or unusual misfortune. Yet, it is generally believed that a person who has performed good or evil action (kamma) will receive its fruition by way of good and evil sooner or later as one will reap what one has sown. They also view that each person is in bondage and has a record both of good and evil kamma. One's life at present is the field where the fruits of one's previous kamma are being reaped, and new kamma are being planted.[59] Previous kamma here means action performed in the past both in this life and the remote past of many lives before this present one.

One's new kamma in this life will in turn form the conditions under which one will be reborn in future. There are no possibilities of avoiding the results of one's kamma. It will follow one wherever one goes or wherever one is reborn, as the wheels of the bullock-cart follow the hooves of the ox.[60] That is, once kamma is performed it becomes an unseen force capable of producing its consequence fruition which may appear in short-range or long-range. Kamma will not become annulled as long as its potency has not yet been exhausted by creating consequences.

Significantly, they also have the view that the condition of the poor, or some undesirable consequence because of their misdeeds which they did in a previous life cannot change until the kammic result has been fully worked out. Therefore, people make merit, giving alms to monks and donations to temples, believing that these are meritorious acts which lead to the accumulation of good kamma and so to a felicitous rebirth: one of prosperity, power, prestige, perfect health, beauty, and very little physical labor. The more merit one accumulates, the better future one can expect. Moreover, this belief is emphasized by monks in the temples, thereby giving a veneer of authority to this popular belief.

Buddhadasa's Idea of Kamma

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59 Na-Rangsi, Sunthorn, *The Buddhist Concept of Karma and Rebirth*. (Bangkok: Mahamakut, 1976), p. 51.

60 Ibid., p. 55.

Buddhadasa's idea of kamma contrasts sharply with the traditional Thai view. He denies not only the passive acceptance of kamma as an unavoidable result of the past fate but also denies that this kind of belief is not the true meaning of kamma in Buddhism, since this interpretation predates the Buddha.[61]

Buddhadasa argues that the traditional notion of kamma which puts the deeds in one life and the results in another one, is superstition, because it is beyond one's ability to control or improve anything. Moreover, one cannot evaluate oneself, as interpretations are given by priests. He points out that kamma in Buddhism is spiritual meaning. It is the subject of right here and now whether it is kamma or its results. For him, the action (kamma) and its result is contiguous. Indeed the fruition of an action exists in the action itself. Kamma in the Buddhist sense emphasizes the will while acting. The performer will receive the result of the action immediately and completely at the beginning of action. That is, doing good is good instantly and doing bad is bad in the act, both in mind and in deed. Other results following from such actions are regarded by Buddhadasa as by-products. He does not regard the present existence as a punishment for past sins but as the domain in which human beings actively control and improve their lives. He asserts that kamma and its result is not beyond understanding, rather that it is based on the law of cause and effect.

According to Buddhadasa, kamma in Buddhism focuses on action (kamma) here and now; and kamma is the ultimate and absolute source for all the good or evil things of this world. It is what differentiates people. This is is the law of kamma. For him kamma and the law of kamma is the principle of being in one's own refuge, that is, taking refuge by ensuring the correctness of one's own deeds. It need not depend on anything; everything can proceed from the beginning to the end through correct action without being helped or interfered with by any supernatural things even the so-called "God". Since these are completely opposite to the principle of taking refuge in oneself. There is, moreover, no power to cancel out the power of kamma. Kamma and the law of kamma are what determines life here and now, no matter whether it is happiness or suffering, wealth or poverty, good luck or bad luck. Buddhadasa pointed out that it is only through the correct understanding of kamma and the

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61 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Buddha-Dhamma for Students*: 1969, p. 21.

law of kamma that one's own refuge is attained and this is the only way to achieve the goals of every human action. Kamma in this sense is comprehensible and it is in one's ability to control and improve one's own life.

Buddhadasa, however, does not conclude his interpretion of kamma at this level but raises it to another stage of meaning by undertaking an interpretation of another remarkable kamma, that is the third kamma (the first and the second kinds of kamma are good and evil kamma). The third kamma, according to Buddhadasa, is the ultimate truth and a kind of kamma that transcends good and evil kamma.[62] He stated that the teaching of good deeds and evil deeds is taught in almost every religion. It is the general moral principle under pinning social morality. It is not the absolute extinction of suffering and not the central meaning of kamma in the Buddhist sense.[63] He indicates that the kamma that Buddha aimed at teaching is the third kamma: the kamma (action) that serves to neutralize good and evil kamma, the kamma that leads one to nibbana.[64] This kind of kamma is not found in other religions.

The third kamma, according to Buddhadasa, confers a higher benefit: it frees one from the strictures of a world defined along the lines of "good and evil".[65] That is, it enables the individual to do good or perform his duties in daily life free from attachment to its fruition. Finally, Buddhadasa points out that the Noble Eightfold Path is the systematic practice of leading one's life in accordance with the third kamma;[66] it leads to a life which is above good and evil kamma where work is done for the sake of work (see the interpretation of work and nibbana).

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62 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Kamma Nua Kamma* [Kamma Beyond Kamma]. (Bangkok: Dhammabucha, 1977), p.2.

63 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

64 Ibid., p. 22.

65 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Upasak Tee Mee Au Nai Kam Puud* [Obstacles in the Speaking Word], (Bangkok: Arun Press, 1968), p.34.

66 The Noble Eightfold Path consists of ; right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livehood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Chapter 5

Origins and Growth of Buddhadasa's Movement

From the very beginning, Buddhadasa and his younger brother, Dhammadasa worked consistently to establish a network of operation to dissiminate his teachings, openly and independently of the Sangha and governmental organizations. The Dhammadana Foundation was set up to support the various activities such as Suan Mokkh, a library, a school, a press, and the journal, Buddhasasana. These activities refl ected the two target levels of Buddhadasa's work for spreading Buddhism: schools and libraries were established for the rural level and the journal reached the urban level.

Buddhadasa is not just a monk who withdraws to practice dhamma at his remote forest hermitage of Suan Mokkh; he is a prolific author of articles and books. The journal, Buddhasasana, was the first medium through which he transmitted his ideas to other monks and lay people. This medium of communication is one forest monks do not generally use. Buddhadasa was not a conventional forest monk, but one who related to the outside world (see Chapter 2).

Origins and Objectives

Buddhadasa's movement began with his own family. Dhammadasa played a vital role in spreading Buddhadasa's ideas. It was around Dhamadasa that lay people, common rural villagers, originally gathered. Buddhadasa has also taught them the dhamma.

Dhammadasa was not a monk but highly interested in religious problems. He adopted the idea and methodology of spreading Buddhism in villages from an article by Dhammapala (see Chapter 3). He set up a library of dhamma books at his shop for lending out so that people would better understand Buddhism.

This was when Thailand was facing an economic depression after the First World War, and when some, especially the educated youth of the country, were beginning to turn away from religion. Four or five local people in Phumrieng sub-district were originally

interested in discussing Buddhist teachings particularly concerning the problems in purifying and reforming Buddhism. These men were young and were farmers, fishers, traders, and carpenterse and they compose the ordinary people in the community. They finally adopted Buddhadasa's ideas and set up a group called themselves Kana Dhammadana (Dhammadana Group) to persuade people of Phumrieng to be interested in the Buddhist teaching and correct practice, organize, plan meetings and informal gatherings. So far the group had been organized by like-minded people of the same social type. It marked the origin of the movement and became an important element in the establishment of Suan Mokkh and the Dhammadana Foundation.

The Dhammadana Group began their work seriously in 1932, the year that Buddhadasa returned home. Buddhadasa's mother supported the work and donated all her retirement money of 6,378 baht for the first fund in June 1932.[1] With this fund, the activities of Suan Mokkh and the Dhammadana Group including the journal, were able to function. His mother, moreover, opened her house for use as a public library, the Dhammadana Group discussions, chanting, conducting Buddhist rites, and sponsoring sermons for people on the regular Buddhist sabbath and the annual holy days. Since religious rites were conventionally held in a temple, it was unusual that they were done at home at that time. Here, 20-30 local people regularly took part. The family home was set up for holding informal ceremonies.

The Dhammadana Foundation (which means the gift of truth excels all other gifts) was formally established in July 1932 at Phumrieng sub-district, Chaiya District, Surat-Thani Province. It consisted of lay people and monks who wanted to be "true" Buddhists and be truly free from suffering, not just in name or tradition. The objectives were as follows:[2]

(1) To participate in developing Buddhism by disclosing the truth of the dhamma-vinaya openly so that Buddhists will receive a sufficiently correct knowledge to obtain its real benefits.

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1 The sum 6,378 baht in 1932 equals 9,567,000 baht in 1988, calculated by comparing with the price of gold.

2 Chit Pibalthan, *Chivit lae Ngan khong Buddhadasa* [Life and Work of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu], (Bangkok: Kaseambunakij, 1971), pp.161-170.

(2) To revive the activity of contemplation (Vipassanadhura) and promote dhamma practice more widely, because the study of the scriptures without serious practice is wasteful.

(3) The Dhammadana Group did not intend to separate or create a schism.

The Buddhadasa movement has continued to insist on the objectives mentioned above, during the half century of its existence. The original purpose of supporting the practice of monks gradually changed to producing dhamma publications and spreading the dhamma. The result has been a rapid expansion of the movement throughout the country. The purpose of the movement for spreading dhamma became more precise and easier to understand under Buddhadasa ideal of bringing back Sila-dhamma. In 1971, the year Buddhadasa reached the age of 65, he announced three new resolutions as objectives of the movement:[3]

(1) To try to make everybody reach the heart of their religion, no matter what religion that person follows.

(2) To create understanding among religions in order to live together in the world.

(3) To join forces in leading the world away from materialism.

These resolutions maintain the earlier objectives but made them more precise and more concrete.

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3 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Tambun Looa Aayu* [Releasing Turtles on Birthday], (Bangkok: Dhammabucha 1982), pp. 138-139.

Development of the Movement

From the very earliest day Buddhadasa and Dhammadasa played greater roles in the community. Once the movement began to spread among local people, some traditional lay-leaders of some temples who also had important roles in Phumrieng were not pleased, and this led to competition and antagonism.[4] However, in 1933 the work moved to another new level which stimulated the growth of their movement and religious revival in the future. The publication of the quarterly Buddhist journal, Buddhasasana, which was issued from a small rural village, became the starting point of the enormous study that Buddhadasa did in comparative religions, religious problems, philosophy, psychology, and society. I would like to say something about the content of the Buddhasasana because it is an effective means to describe the development of Buddhadasa's thinking.

The journal consisted of three sections, translations of the Tipitaka from Pali into Thai, promotion of dhamma practice, and miscellaneous items. The first two sections mainly offer articles and translations of a great number of the Suttas which Buddhadasa deems suitable for the present time. It involves Buddhist teachings in theoretical terms, accompanied by explanations of the doctrines that were seen as the main principles for practice. The third section provided news about Buddhist and non Buddhist religious reform movements and propagation in other countries, and criticisms of the Sangha and Buddhist circles in Thailand. Buddhadasa took the whole responsibility for the first two sections. The third he left to Dhammadasa to write. It should be noted that some of the latter were rather strong but were written with sensibility and responsibility. The regular contributors were Buddhadasa and Dhammadasa, both using different pen names. Buddhadasa used more than 10 pen names for

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4 First, the lay leader of Wat Nua began to claim that there was a mad monk at Suan Mokkh. In the morning when Indapanno went for alms, Muslim children in the nearby village would run away, shouting to others that the mad monk was coming. They told one another that Indapanno was mad and had been detained to guard the abandoned temple and they had better look out. Such misunderstandings persisted for many months before dying down, see Pasanadhammo Bhikkhu, *Lau-wai Mua Wai-soantaya* [Recollection in the Twilight Years Vol.1-3] (Bangkok: Komolkeemthong Foundation, 1985), pp. 7-8.

writing from different perspectives.[5] Dhammadasa was also an editor and worked on every step of the publication himself until now.

During the first few years (1933-1938), the Buddhasasana was distributed for free. Its subscribers increased to more than 1,000 after ten years, most of whom were in Bangkok. From my survey of the Buddhasasana (1934-1985) I found that during two decades (1932-1952) the responses from the readers included compliments, suggestions, comments, criticism and reproaches. They were numerous because the interpretations of Buddhadasa challenged the traditional conservative atmosphere of Thai Buddhism. From my survey of the section of the Tipitaka translation, Buddhadasa chose to translate suttas that strongly attacked monks and laymen who adhered to superstitions or sought fame and fortune. Later, however, Buddhadasa admitted that this method was not effective because monks and lay people had followed the traditional beliefs for so long that they had taken deep root. He could only inform them that certain practices mentioned in the Pali text differed from what they had been taught and were practicing. Apparently, these suttas had never before seen translated and used in this way. Buddhadasa himself wrote articles for the first twenty years. Later, however, most of his articles were taken from his sermons in various places and published serially. It can be said that at the beginning Buddhasasana was the spearhead of the movement and spread new explanations of Buddhist doctrines to small intellectual groups, both monk and laity.

In 1934, Buddhadasa translated a series of texts from the Tipitaka, The Buddha's Life in His Own Words. It was a new thing and the translation was published in Buddhasasana.

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5 The pen names that Buddhadasa used for writing articles were as follows: Buddhadasa, used for writing about dhamma directly. This pen name was never criticized. It received only compliments. Indapanno and Dhammayodha, used for translation of selected suttas which criticized the behavior of some groups of monks and laymen who deviated from the dhamma-vinaya Both pen names received most of the critical letters. Some people were so angry that they wrote to the editor asking him to expel Indapanno. Nai Hetphon was used for the pretence of disputing Buddhism in various aspects and actually did not reflect the real feeling of the writer, Pariandek was for presenting opinions about various activities and movements of the Thai Sangha; Siriwayas wrote dhamma poems; Sanghasena fought for dhamma and rightness; Duralokaramacit introduced subjects concerning the world and dhamma. This pen-name was seldom used; I.P., was used for the translation of suttas in the Tipitaka; Khaphachao wrote funny stories for the readers; Chinnawat, was used for various critiques.

Later the articles were compiled and published as a highly sucessful book. The significance of this book lie on the emphasis of Buddha as a man and how he actually lived, thus providing Buddha's life as a realistic model for people in the twentieth century. The translation only recounted Buddha's life in his own words, not including any commentaries or the translator's explanation. Buddhadasa's style of translation was simple, enabling the readers both "clergy and laity" to understand. His book was accepted as a textbook by The Board of Education of the Mahamakut, a Thammayut Buddhist University. It was more popular than other translations of the the Buddha's life, such as that by Wachirayan, the former royal Thammayut Supreme Patriarch (see Chapter 2).

Later Buddhadasa compiled and translated other teachings of the Buddha in His Own Words, publishing them as large texts dealing with no less than 2-3 main subjects. They were also popular and were reprinted in a large quantities. He began this work in 1934 and finished it in the later years of his life (1984). This was one of his most challenging tasks, one which he took on with great care in order to return to original Buddhism.

In 1935, Dhammadana Foundation led by Dhammadasa moved from Phumrieng to Chaiya (six kilometers from Phumrieng), due to the change of main railway line. A library, a community club and a printing press were opened in the new location, and the various activities continued. Buddhadasa himself regularly walked to Phumrieng 4 times a month to give sermons at the new site of the Dhammadana Foundation. A number of local people joined the activities. On Buddhist holy days, hundreds of people participated.

In the following year (1936), the activity of Dhammadana Group was operating like a mission. The Buddhanigama School (Buddhist community school) was established to teach the primary and secondary education curricula, with knowledge of Buddhism as a supplement. This was done following the model of Christian dissemination through an education system, which the missionaries from the West were doing in Thailand. Buddhadasa and Dhammadasa wished to implant a sufficient understanding of Buddhism in children and young people. They saw that it was the proper method to propagate Buddhism. In this school, unlike others, the teachers and pupils had to follow the five basic principles of being

good Buddhist.[6] The school opened in 1936 with 54 pupils and the number increased to 500 ten years later.[7] Most of the locally born officials more than 30 years old graduated from this school.[8]

There is evidence that Buddhadasa also thought of a plan to manage a university-level education which would have Buddhism taught just like other subjects so that students could learn the Dhamma thoroughly enough to apply to their way of life and the society.[9] But the plan was not done because of financial problems.

Studying the scriptures and practicing simultaneously, helped Buddhadasa discover the profound and universal meanings of Buddhist doctrines. Thus the more unusual his interpretations seemed and the more he attracted people to the Buddhist teaching and practice. Moreover, another step was taken when Buddhadasa developed the scope of explaining Buddhist teaching through other religious doctrines such as Zen, Tao, Mahayana Buddhism, Christianity, as well as natural science in order to help explain some aspects of Theravada doctrine become more comprehensible. He also translated Lankavatara Sutta, a highly respect sutta of Mahayan from English into Thai and published in the journal Buddhadasa in 1937, later The Hui Neng Sutta and The Zen Teaching of Huang Po of Zen Buddhism were also translated.

It became apparent that interest in Buddhadasa's teaching was not confined to local people. Through Buddhasasana his teaching attracted small groups of urban intellectuals both monks and laymen in Bangkok. Interest among them appeared to be strong. In 1937, Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (Charoen Nanavarathera) of Wat Thepsirin, who was a high-ranking

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6 The five principles of the Buddhanigama School are as every teacher and pupils

(1) must not take any addictive, substance.
(2) must not gamble.
(3) must save, spending only as necessary.
(4) must be deligent in his work and duty.
(5) must have a spiritual refuge and lead his life as a Buddhist with right understanding (Interview with Dhammadasa, Chaiya, 1988).

7 Interview with Dhammadasa at Chaiya, 1988.

8 Interview a retired officer, who had studied at Buddhanigama school, Chaiya, March 1988.

9 Ibid.

senior monk of Thammayutnikai and was then also Chairman of the Sangha Council privately visited Buddhadasa at his remote forest retreat of Suan Mokkh, after it had been in operation for 6 years.[10]

Moreover, articles in Buddhasasana also inspired a group of Supreme Court officials; Phraya Latphli Thamma-prakhan (a barrister-at-law trained in England), Phraya Phroratchasuphit (a judge of the Appeal Court)[11] and Sanya Thammasak,[12] (an official of the Ministry of Justice) to visit Suan Mokkh in 1938. They were the first group of distinguished laymen from Bangkok to study the dhamma at the remote hermitage of Suan Mokkh. They stayed in small huts and had to take care of all their needs. This group became a great financial supporter of Suan Mokkh's activities and publication.

The consequence of the two visits resulted in Buddhadasa's movement achieving the reputation of being exclusively concerned with socially prominent persons both monks and laymen. The role and status of these groups constituted an impressive and possibly, dramatic testimony to Buddhadasa's movement.

In 1940, Buddhadasa accepted an invitation from the Buddhist Association of Thailand to give a lecture in Bangkok. At this point Buddhadasa's movement took an important turning point in the process of its development. The lecture in Bangkok has had a profound consequence in the way Buddhadasa's movement not only survived but also come out even more widely propagated than before. It was also the first time Buddhadasa introduced himself to the people in the capital. His full-form dhamma lecture was titled "The Way of Reaching Buddha-Dhamma," and lasted two and a half hours. Buddhadasa explained a high level

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10 Buddhadasa sproke of the visit of the Somdet as follows: "The visit surprised us, since no one expected such kindness and sympathy from a high- ranking monk. He risked his honor in visiting us who, at that time were charged by some groups of people as being eccentrics and perverts. (Pasanadhammo Bhikkhu, *Phap Chivit Paadseebpee Buddhadasa* [The Life Image of Buddhadasa at 80 years old] (Bangkok: Komolkeemthong Foundation, 1986), p. 72.

11 Phraya was the hightest position of the Thai traditional official hierachy.

12 Sanya Thammasak was a former President of Thammasat University, a former President of the Supreme Court, a former Prime Minister of Thailand (1973-1975). At present he is the President of the Privy Council.

interpretation of dhamma principles which he compared with their scientific counterparts. It was innovative and greatly enhanced public awareness at that time. Consequently, the lecture was published and reprinted several times.

In this dhamma lecture, Buddhadasa also began a new tradition for giving a sermon: he stood instead of sitting and holding the scripture in a traditional manner. He was the first monk at that time who came out of the temple to speak to the public in ordinary language.[13] As a result, he was rebuked by the conservatives that it was against the vinaya that forbids a standing monk from talking to a sitting laity.

The first challenging lecture resulted in Buddhadasa being accepted and highly favored by intellectuals in the capital. He was then invited by various prestigious institutions in Bangkok such as Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, the ecclesicstical university, the Teachers Association, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, various hospitals and temples to give sermons. He became the model of a modern lecturer monk, who gives sermons on up to date topics relevant to the current situation and problems. Buddhadasa was the first monk to be accepted by the progressive democratic and socialist section of the Thai intelligensia. Kulab Saipradit, a famous socialist writer, wrote articles of support in his column. We can say that since 1940, Buddhadasa's movement began to expand among urban middle class, particularly in Bangkok and became an urban religious movement.

One of the lectures that shook the Thai Sangha most strongly and is still influential and controversial even today was "The Mountain on the Buddha- Dhamma Way" (1948), which advanced the view point that the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha (The Triple Gems) if adhered to with wrong understanding would become like the Himalayas mountain, obstructing the path to Nibbana. In this lecture, Buddhadasa was opposed by the radical conservative lay persons, who accused him of being hired by the communists to attack Buddhism. As a result, he had to have an audience with the Supreme Partiarch to explain the matter in detail.

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13 Phongphit, Seri, *Religion in Changing Society*. (Hong Kong: ARENA, 1988) p. 9.

Another lecture that attracted thousands of people to attend, such as the "Questions and Answers" dialogue between Buddhadasa and M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a famous democratic politician.[14] In one of these dialogues, "Working with an Empty Mind", became very controversial. They were unable to agree on some important dhamma principles. Buddhadasa maintained that the world and dhamma is one and the same, nibbana can be attained through one's functioning in daily life, when one works with selflessness (without the sense of "I" and "mine"). Mindfulness and wisdom are actually the the key factors for success in all types of work. Kukrit argued that the world and dhamma have to be separated; one's duty cannot be to attain nibbana, as nibbana concerned only the monks or people who turn their back on the world. This argument reflects the understanding of Buddhism by high class Thais and differs little from the common people. Buddhism is seen in terms of two separated worlds: the world of the monk and of the laity.

Some lectures, such as "Buddha-Dhamma and the Spirit of Democracy", were attended by the Regent, Pridi Phanomyoung, a prominent political elite, another of Buddhadasa's admirers. There was evidence that he invited Buddhadasa to meet him at his house three times.[15] Although the contents of the conversations were not recorded, one topic was the Regent's consultation regarding setting up dhamma centers like Suan Mokkh in many places including Ayuthaya, his home town, and a plan for promoting a proper form of Buddhism. All these projects had to be cancelled, though, when Pridi faced political difficulties and had to leave the country (see Chapter 2).

Under the aboslutist regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat who initiated the first national economic development plan, Buddhist teaching was selectively reformed to suit Sarit's plans and programs. Some aspects of the teachings which opposed his actions were censored. For example, he opposed the teaching of santosa as being an impediment to national development (santosa means satisfaction with whatever is one's own). Buddhadasa was the only monk who insisted the concept of sandosa and argued that the "contenment"

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14 M.R.Kukrit Pramoj was a former Prime Minister during 1976-1978.

15 Interview Phra Panyanandha Bhikkhu. Buddhadasa invited him to paticipate with the Regent on the second time.

means being pleased with whatever one owns or is doing. This kind of pleasure maintain one's will power and motivates one to do more. Achieving contentment in whatone has done serves reinforcement to work harder. The teaching of santosa, therefore, does not obstruct development but promotes it. On the one hand, whoever is not satisfied with what one has done, sooner or later one will certainly go insane. Moreover, he also criticized the government's slogan and development policy of "Work is Money and Money is Work, both leading to Happiness" as a two edged knife. To encourage people to worship money will eventually lead to corruption.[16]

After more than a decade of religious writing and propagation, many monks and lay people visited Suan Mokkh, necessitating a bigger site. Work on the new Suan Mokkh, with a forest area of 124 acres at Chaiya, began in 1943. It was a big forest park similar to one in the Buddha's time to stimulate monks to pay more attention to practice. Four or five huts were at first built in the woods; later the number grew to 25, and still later to more than 70 huts.[17] The following year, in 1944, Buddhadasa moved to the new Suan Mokkh.

It is important to note that the expansion of Buddhadasa's movement is directly related to publication and dissemination of his teaching. Issues of Buddhasasana from 1933 to 1946, were rather limited due to the small numbers of readers.[18] His press was a small hand machine; his budget was limited; and paper was very scarce, especially during World War II. After 1947, the number of his journals and books increased.[19] This was partly because of his first famous lecture in Bangkok in 1940, which popularized his work. Furthermore, he was invited to give lectures at many educational institutions and government offices in Bangkok each year.

16 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu: 1985, p. 292.

17 The hut was 2x3 meters (including a balcony) made of wood about, 1.5 meters above ground, with 3 windows. The huts are in the forest about 50 meters apart, with a small trail leading from one to another. Each hut is for one monk. The facility in the hut includes a kettle, an electric light, a mat, and a wooden pillow (from the author's observation).

18 Thai population after World War II was about 18 million. At present (1988) it is approximately 50 million.

19 From the survey of Louis Gabaude in 1988.

Suan Buddha-Dhamma was established in the Northern province of Chiang Mai by Cheun Sirorot, a progressive businessman, and began first to spread Buddhadasa's work in the North in 1948. In 1949, Buddhadasa was appointed by the Sangha to be the regional leader for dhamma propagation throughout the 14 provinces of the South In 1950, he was invited by Phraya Amornrit Thamrong, the Royal Commissioner for the Southern Region to go on an official dhamma propagation tour to every district of the South in order to teach and train the local people, government officials, and students. He accepted many tours like this. Beginning in 1956, Buddhadasa was asked to lecture on dhamma during the annual training of prospective judges.

All of these activities made Buddhadasa more well known among monks and lay people in both Bangkok and many provinces. His lectures at Suan Mokkh and other places were also recorded and published by others. One of his followers, a pro-socialist scholar named Sa-ad Watcharaphai, set up the publishing house Suwichan in 1953 and began to print Buddhadasa's teachings regularly. This was the first time that his books were published by a publishing house. Production was modern with attractive book covers containing lists of Buddhadasa's books on the back. This attracted many more interested buyers. Buddhadasa's work has also been printed in Chieng Mai, where another local Buddhist journal, Chao Buddh, is published.

In 1957 Pun Chongprasert (a former culture attache) established Ongkarn Fuan-Fu Phra Buddhasasana (the Buddhist Revival Organization) and published hundreds of thousands of Buddhadasa's books both for sale and for free distribution to temples all over the country. Then, in 1962, Wirot Siriat (a young lawer) started Kana Puaphea Chevit Anprasert (the Sublime Life Mission) and a publishing house, Dhammabucha, which has published more books by Buddhadasa than anyone else.[20] The Sublime Life Mission is a significant source for supporting groups of monks and lay people who spread Buddhadasa's teachings in various places, especially in terms of audiovisual aids and teaching media such as slides, tapes, and

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20 Interview with Mr. Wirot Siriat, Bangkok, 1988. Wirot is an attorney who has benefitted spiritually from the teachings of Buddhadasa. He then devoted himself to spreading and publishing Buddhadasa's books. The book, Handbook For Mankind changed his life. He sees his life's work as spreading Buddhadasa's teaching for the benefit of others. When Sa-ad Watcharaphai had to stop his publication due to his health, Wirot continued the task, changing the name of the publishing house from Suwichan to Dhammabucha.

books. Later, other presses in Bangkok such as Prae-Phittaya, Khlang-Wittaya, Kasem-Bannakit, and Sukhaphap-Chai printed Buddhadasa's books as well, but their interests were only commercial.

Another important group established in Bangkok was the Suan Usom Foundation (1958). Its aim is to promote dhamma practice particularly among well-to-do, well educated women. Some of them were ex-officials in the Ministry of Education who have played an important role in introducing Buddhadasa's teachings into Thai academic circles. This group has worked a volunteer editorial team, including transcribing all Buddhadasa's teachings from tapes and then publishing them. It also played an important role in categorizing all of Buddhadasa's writings and published them in a permanent, hard-cover form called the Dhamma Proclamation Series.

Moreover, there were still other groups, associations and foundations, including various clubs in universities, schools, hospitals and other official offices, which published his articles and books for distribution within their own groups. There were also private publications of Buddhadasa's articles together with the teaching of many other monks for distribution at birthday parties, funeral ceremonies, and on other occasions. Buddhadasa's teachings are also broadcast on radio by his followers, both in Bangkok and other provinces. In 1978, Buddhadasa accepted an invitation by the national broadcasting authority to give sermons on a nation-wide radio broadcast every month which has continued up to the present.

A large quantity of publishing of Buddhadasa's teachings is a significant phenomena. There is perhaps no Buddhist monk in the history of Thai Buddhism whose teachings were tape-recorded and have been as widely published as Buddhadasa. It reflects partly Buddhadasa's followers want to know his ideas and further spread them, and partly because of the demand of the middle- class in big cities. It also implies that part of the middle class in Bangkok rather than merely passively accepting Buddhadasa's teachings, also began actively to reproduce and propagate them. Importantly, after 1962 the center of propagation moved from Chaiya to Bangkok. The financial backing of a large publication, it was explained, came from urban men. Spreading Buddhadasa's teaching became a chief characteristic of the

movement.

In the early period, Buddhadasa wrote the articles himself, composing them in a concise style. Later, however, when his talks were recorded and published his style became more verbose and repetitive. The more his works appeared in books, the more frequently he was invited to give sermons. The more his sermons were recorded, the more books were published and the less writing he did. Louis Gabaude reported in 1988 that since 1955 the number of Buddhadasa's books increased rapidly due to use of tape recorders.

Publishing the unedited sermons, makes for less satisfactory books, especially since Buddhadasa does not have time to check what has been transcribed. Pun, an editor and publisher, has edited Buddhadasa's sermons giving them provocatives titles. He has played a major role in propagating Buddhadasa's ideas among monks and common people in provinces. Without Pun's contibutions, Buddhadasa's teaching might have interested a much smaller group of people. For example, his lecture for the prospective judges in 1956 were summarized by Pun published under the title, Handbook For Mankind which became more popular than the full lecture published by Suwichan.[21]

Later Pun not only summarized Buddhadasa's sermons but gave them a more severe critical edge, attacking monks who did not follow the dhamma-vinaya. Through Pun's work Buddhadasa's teachings became more comprehensible, so ordinary people could understand even the concept of Nibbana. But this sensationalism also caused to make Buddhadasa's teaching more aggressive than was really the case, and easier to misunderstand. It is possible that Buddhadasa decided to publish the Dhamma Proclamation Series in 1972 without summarization to avoid such a problem.

After 1966 Buddhadasa stopped accepting invitations to give lectures outside Suan Mokkh due to his health. However, many sermons were given on special occasions or for

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21 From our survey, we found that Handbook For Mankind is one of the three books that people know best from their first encounter. These three books are: Handbook For Mankind, The Foolery, Everyday Language and Dhamma Language. The first two books are the ones Pun summarized from Buddhadasa's works.

different groups that ask for training such as students ordained during summer vacation, teachers, doctors, officials from many different offices, people in general, and foreigners.[22] Each sermon and training session was tape-recorded. Many of them have not still been published. Many new books continue to be published. Buddhadasa still continues to teach.

Expansion of the Movement

During the first ten years, the expansion of the movement was rather limited. Although several social and religious activities of the Dhammadana Foundation at the community level were expanded, the ideas of Buddhadasa which were spread by the Buddhasasana attracked only a small number of the highly educated monks and laymen in the capital. Their interest in Buddhism was intellectual; they were unhappy with the traditional teachings and wanted to believe in Buddhism from a new perspective. As intellectuals well known in Thai society, their prestige and fame have caused Buddhadasa's teachings to spread effectively within their circles.

Since 1940s, Buddhadasa's works were published and have been rapidly disseminated for reasons already mentioned. It seems that the expansion of the Buddhadasa's movement is inseparable from the spread of his teachings. Those who adopted his interpretation were the ones who supported and then further spread them in various forms in accordance with their concepts, abilities, and methods without, being subject to anybody's plans, policies, or strategic purposes. The motivation for spreading Buddhadasa's teachings arises from their understanding of Buddhism as interpreted by Buddhadasa. They turned to religion in realization of its value to life, and the need to let others know what they know. Participants of the movement followed Buddhadasa based on their need for personal religious understanding and not because of a demand to become a part of the movement. The sense of dedication and devotion is strong in individual followers.

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22 From my observation at Suan Mokkh, within one month (March 1988), there were 13 groups of students, teachers, doctors and people who visited Suan Mokkh and asked for sermon and dhamma practice for 3 days to 2 weeks. The people of these groups were about 5-30 persons. Apart from these, there were about 10 group tours, including children coming to visit Suan Mokkh just for 2-3 hours, most of them wanted to see the Spiritual Theater.

A few of the monks and laity who spread the works of Buddhadasa's had never met him or visited Suan Mokkh. Those involved decided what and how much they would do. They are in various professions and introduce the teachings to others in their own groups. They set up their own form with their own identity or talent and at their own expense. Each follower in the movement embodies in themselves a "movement" because they disseminate Buddhadasa's teaching in the way that each individual response causes a tangible impact in society. Each one in the movement use his own style in sharing the message with others. There was no form required by Suan Mokkh. With a similar background, it is easier to communicate, and the teachings are expanded in a wider scope effectively. Certainly, simplification of Buddhadasa's teaching has been worked out to suit various groups of people. Communication techniques and indirect propagation are used. As a result there are several forms in promoting Buddhadasa's teaching, for example students spread the teachings to their friends through cartoons and short true-to-life poems and by organizing ordination programs during summer vacation.

Some of them gathered in commonly organized groups, developed independent forms of reaching a large number of people. Many groups worked quietly and did not make themselves known, thus having fewer obstacles in their work than some other movements. Organizations, Foundations, and about 50-70 groups and clubs that were established after the Dhammadana Foundation such as Suan Buddha-dhamma (1947) or Sublime Life Mission (1962), originated from the ideas and needs of lay people who adopted Buddhadasa's teachings. They consisted mostly of young people from various professions, working independently, using their own funds, and expanding their works following their own ideas and methods. There were no specific practices or symbols that distinguished Buddhadasa's followers from others. The form at these sub-levels responded to the needs of the people and the localities and became one of the most significant factor for the expansion of the movement.

Buddhadasa's movement had unofficially expanded at many levels and in numerous forms. Quite often the message spread to the person's family, relatives, and friends. Expansion of the movement was multi directional: from monks to laymen and laymen to monks, from

teachers to students and students to teachers, from parents to children and children to parents, from friends to friends, from persons to group or institutions and vice versa. Interest in Buddhadasa's teachings was often sparked by his books. Significantly, laymen who become interested in his teachings have played an important role in the propagation of his ideas. They have actively undertaken to spread the message through activities that range from the establishment of the monastic center, private library, publication of books, student ordination program to face to face talks. Our interviews with his followers illustrate quite clearly many of the characteristics of the way in which his teaching have gained a growing following. We choose four examples from the interviews as representations to show the varied forms of propagating Buddhadasa's teaching which in turn reflects the different backgrounds and personalities of the movement followers, namely a businessman, a student, a housewife, and an ex-shaman.

The first example is Mr. Chuen Sirorot, a well-to-do businessman in Chiang Mai who came to know Buddhadasa's work from a book his brother in Bangkok sent him The Way of Reaching Buddha-Dhamma and Methods of Dhamma Practice.[23] The explanation of dhamma was somthing he had never heard of before. He read it over 30 times. Once he understood it, he decided to work for sasana (religion or Buddhism) as did the Dhammadana Foundation in Chaiya. He established Suan Buddha-Dhamma, a forest monastic centre in 1947 on an area of 53 acres, and invited Buddhadasa's monk-followers to reside. A press house, a library, and a public hall were set up. Buddhadasa's teachings and a Buddhist journal were published. He has supported spreading the dhamma in the north in all forms for fourty years. He said "there is no work better than opening people's minds and giving them spiritual illumination."[24]

The second example is Mr. Nikhom Chetcharoenrak, an ex-student of Thammasat University. He is the first person who organized A Student Ordination Project during the

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23 Interview with Mr. Chuen Sirorot, a well-to-do businessman in Chiang Mai, September 1988. Chuen at present is 93 years old He was the first to introduce the teachings and works of Buddhadasa's to Chiang Mai and the North. He was a progressive intellectual in his youth and a pioneer in establishing the Teacher's College of Chiang Mai.

24 Ibid.,

summer session of the Thammasat University.[25] He learnt about the works of Buddhadasa when he was a student, from a small book a friend lent to him. It was a strange explanation of dhamma but it was comprehensible. He visited Suan Mokkh in 1970. At Suan Mokkh he experienced peace and first realized the importance of Buddhism to his life. Back from Suan Mokkh he tried to spread Buddhism among the students in Thammasat University. Discussions and seminars on Buddhism were held presided by the famous monks. A project to ordain students during the summer vacation was organized and 35 students enlisted in the first group to practice dhamma at Suan Mokkh for 45 days. It was also supported by the President of Thammasat University, Sanya Dhammasak (one of Buddhadasa's followers). The project was continued until now.

Perhaps one of the most ambitious examples of a response to Buddhadasa's teaching is Mrs. Sali Chaisrisin, a housewife whose Buddhist understanding and practice had focused mainly on making merit, attending sermons and performing Buddhist rituals and precepts.[26] She came to know Buddhadasa's books from a monk in 1976, but did not understand them until two years later. She said "Buddhadasa explains the dhamma differently from others in a way that I had never heard".[27] Once she had grasped the concept of everyday language and dhamma language she understood and turned her own house into a library because it is in an area that faces many temples. There are many books and tapes on the dhamma, which are mostly authored by Buddhadasa and Pannananda Bhikkhu.[28] Many monks, novices, and neighbors use it. She also encouraged her five sons (all of them are officers) to be ordained and trained at Suan Mokkh. She said "Buddhism is benificial for every life."[29]

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25 From interview of Mr. Nikhom Jetcharaonrat, at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, May 1987. Nikhom at present, 39 years old, is a regional bank legal consultant. He first studied the work of Buddhadasa in 1970 at age 23. He was the originator of the Students Summer Odination Program of Thammasat University.

26 An interview with Mrs.Sali Chaisrisin at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, June 1988. Sali now 57 years old, is a housewife. She finished four years of elementary education, and was first interested in the works of Buddhadasa's in 1967.

27 Interview with Mrs. Sali at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

28 Panyananda Bhikkhu, the abbot of Wat Chonprathan in Nonthaburi, near Bangkok, who promote Buddhadasa's teaching and has long held Buddhadasa in great respect as "elder brother."

29 Ibid.

It is worth noting, however, that Buddhadasa's lay followers have had to overcome considerable obstacles in their efforts to spread Buddhadasa's teachings among monks. This may not be surprising in view of the monks interest in the preservation of orthodox Buddhist teachings. An example is Mr. Ta Chaiwong, the first person who introduced Buddhadasa's teachings to the people of Chiang Rai.[30] He used to be a famous shaman and gave up after reading Buddhadasa's book, Handbook for Mankind in 1954. The book changed his attitude towards Buddhism and he has distributed copies of the book to others. During the Buddhist Lents and on Buddhist Sabbath days, he stayed at temples to talk and to spread the Dhamma to lay people who spent the night there to perform Buddhist rituals. Each Sabbath day he changed to another temple. He went to every temple in every district in Chiang Rai, over 100 temples (about 8 temples annually in all) and paid all the expenses. He reprinted Buddhadasa's teachings in pamphlet form and distributed them for free. Ta also volunteered to demolish spirit houses; for those who wanted to do it but dared not do it themselves.

Certainly, there were a lot of obstacles to his work because the monks and lay people in Chiang Rai had never heard an explanation of Buddhism like that of Buddhadasa's. The head monks in some districts charged that he was a communist inciting the villagers. In 1979, Ta organized the Dhamma Mobilizing conference in Chiang Rai. It appeared that no well-educated monk in Chiang Rai accepted his invitation to help as resource persons even to take part in the opening ceremony. No town temples permitted him to use their places. He decided to use an abandoned area in a tobacco curing factory; inviting 30 monks from the Northeast and the South who spread the dhamma in Buddhadasa's way to teach people. He also distributed leaflets inviting the people of Chiang Rai to partice dhamma.

The first Dhamma Mobilizing Conference (3 days) was successful beyond his expectations. There were more than a thousand monks and lay people participating. In the following year, the conference was held in a temple because an abbot who attended the first one saw that this was a useful project. The fourth conference, the senior monks in the

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30 From an interview with Mr. Ta Chaiwong at Wat Dong Nong Pet, Muang District, Chiang Rai Province, August 1988. Ta now is 74 years old. He has never been ordained, and has attended a a primary school for 4 years. He first knew of Buddhadasa's works when he was 40 years old. He was the first to spread Buddhadasa's teachings to Chiang Rai.

province cooperated and acted as the resource persons themselves. He has organized this project every year until now.

Following is an observation on the expansion of Buddhadasa's teachings by Pun Chongprasert who was the most important one in promoting Buddhadasa's teaching. He said that:[31]

> "I have published many important teachings in Buddhism and distributed them to the people for more than 15 years. I would like to note that all the senior monks have never shown any interest in or supported dissemination of the truth. However, Buddhadasa's teachings among the intellectuals spread all over Thailand because of their intrinsic value; whoever has read them and satisfied with them tell their continues."

The expansion of Buddhadasa's movement without any core or central organization may be seen as a weak point of the movement. However, it may also be the strength of the movement because there can be no "enemy." [32] Instead of establishing a modern organization, having the same regulations and practices for a group of different people, Buddhadasa chose to spread the dhamma in an unofficial or formless manner, by which the teachings were passed on to people of different groups in society. Buddhadasa himself, although he acquired a high rank in the Sangha hierachy, seemed not to get involved in the administrative organization. While he is officially abbot of the royal monastery of Wat Phabaramadhatu in Chaiya, he has never in fact taken up that position, preferring to remain at Suan Mokkh. To the questions about the organizing of his work, he said "I would not think of organizing a working system because I was not sure of my ability in this matter."[33] Most likely however, Buddhadasa did not trust any system, even the system of Sangha administration. Rather he

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31 Pun Chongprasert, *A Shortcut Method of Practicing Dhamma*. Samut Prakan: the Organization for the Reform of Buddhism, unknown dated, back cover.

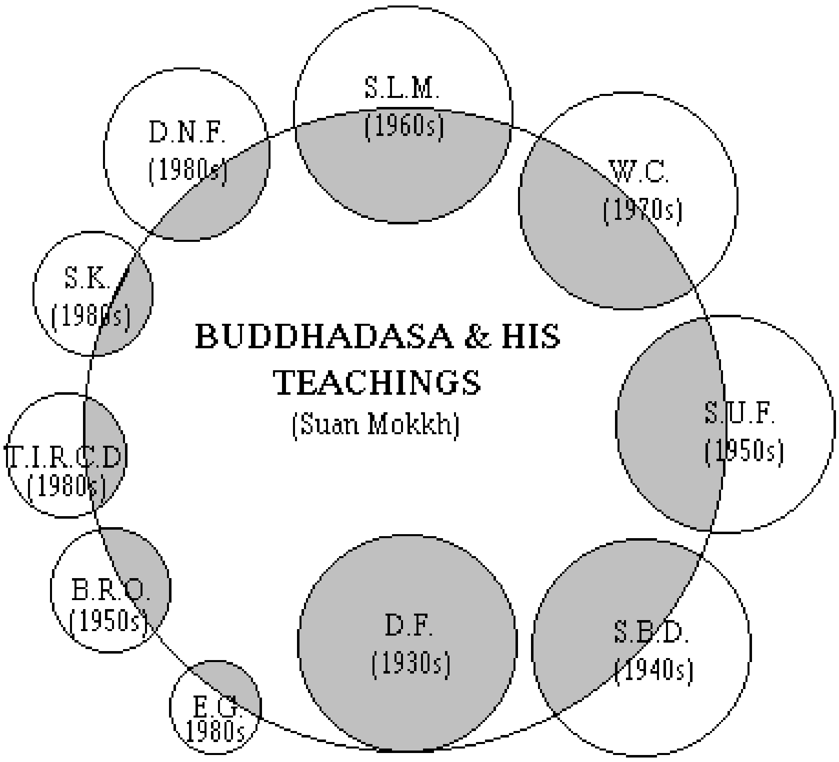
32 There is an evidence showing that Buddhadasa thought of establishing a large organization for propagation of the dhamma but did not carry on. Buddhadasa was once asked by a senior monk to outline an effective means of spreading Buddhism. The outline he proposed in 1953 actually was a big, modernly-administrated organization for propagation of the dhamma. It is a pity that it was not implemented.

33 Pasannadhammo Bhikkhu, *Lau-wai Mua Wai-soantaya* [Recollection in the Twilight Years Vol.1-3] (Bangkok: Komolkeemthong Foundation, 1985), p. 365.

trusted the inner quality of individuals. Although a system allows orderly work, Buddhadasa saw its weak point as being the base of attachment or a way to protect bad individuals. Moreover, the universal characteristic of Buddhadasa's interpretations of Buddhism provide the opportunity for his followers to apply the teaching to suit people in various conditions with an increasingly fluid type of organization in which many special purpose sub-groups formed and disbanded.

Though Buddhadasa's movement was characterized as a loosely organized movement, however in its simplest form, perhaps, the structure of the movement may be thought of as a series of concentric circles extending outward from the leader to number of groups and individuals. Following this is a chart to illustrate a simple form of the diffusion of Buddhadasa's movement.

Figure 1 : An example of a chart of working groups/organizations within Buddhadasa's movement



DF	the Dhammadana Foundation, Chaiya, 1930s
SK	Suan Kaew, Nonthaburi, 1980s
WC	Wat Chonprathan, Nonthaburi, 1970s
EG	Etappajayata Group, Saraburi, 1980s.
SBD	Suan Bhaddha-Dhamma, Chiang Mai, 1940s.
SUF	the Suan Usom Foundation, Bangkok, 1950s.
BRO	the Buddhist Revival Organization, Samut Prakarn, 1950s
SLM	the Sublime Life Mission, Bangkok, 1960s
DNF	the Dhamma Naat Foundation, Chiang Mai, 1980s.
TIRCD	Thai Inter-religious Commission of Development, Bangkok, 1980s.

----- Broken lines signify the non-formalized links of groups with Buddhadasa.

Shaded areas [Size indicates extents of relationship] signify the overlap of Buddhadasa's teachings with the basic beliefs of the groups. This also shows closer ties with Suan Mokkh and Buddhadasa. For example: D.F. has a complete overlap with Buddhadasa and Suan Mokkh because it is the group which directly works for the propagation and dissemination of Buddhadasa's teachings under the leadership of Buddhadasa's brother.

Though, it may be seen from the chart that the above groups and organizations were formed under Buddhadasa's movement they, however originate and develop rather independently. All of its leaders both monks and laymen repeat that their establishments are not branches of Suan Mokkh. The relation between Suan Mokkh and those organizations, groups and temples that spread the teachings of Buddhadasa is not that of a centralized network, but independent units working for the the same ideal. The relationships among them are personal. Some have worked in rural areas. They meet from time to time in small forums, organized by themselves. But systematic or formal cooperation does not happen. Mutual assistance follows this personal relationship. Exchange and reflection of experiences keep these groups abreast of the situation. However, there are some long-term cooperative activities among some groups, particularly after these groups have expanded, taken significant role, and have more personnel.

Significantly, cooperation between monk and lay organizations are very noticeable.[34] Groups like that at Wat Chonpathan where Pannananda Bhikkhu, a junior colleague of Buddhadasa is the abbot, the Sublime Life Mission, the Sila-Dhamma Teacher Club and Suan Usom Foundation work together with other groups including the Sangha and some government offices such as the Ministry of Education. For example, official nation wide training of moral education teachers has been organized regularly for more than 10 years (1977-1989) through the cooperation of the Sublime Life Mission, the Sila-Dhamma Teacher Club, Wat Cholapathan, and the Ministry of Education. A project in the preparation of curriculum for teaching Buddhism guides in primary and secondary schools by the Ministry of Education was done with Suan Usom Foundation and the Sublime Life Mission.

The relation between Buddhadasa and his followers, both monks and the laity, is a traditional one. There is no personal relationship. This is the frame of common relationship between an old monk and his followers in Thai society. Certainly, there are communications and visits between them, mostly they see Buddhadasa on some special occasions, or once a year on his birthday. Actual consultations with Buddhadasa are apparently rare.[35] The relation between them and Buddhadasa surpasses one of person to person; it is one between person and ideal. One monk-follower said that "Buddhadasa and he himself may not think alike, but he respects him for having the same ideals as he does."[36] Buddhadasa himself also insisted

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34 Examples of co-operation between monks and lay organizations:

(1) Close co-sponsorship and cooperation between Dhamma Sathan of Chulalongkorn University and Wat Pha-laad and that between the Buddhasil Club of Chiang Mai University and Wat Pha-laad.

(2) Consultation service for development projects between Phra Banyat Anutaro of Wat Pa-Thammada, Bua-Yai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province and Phrakru Thawondhammawat of Wat Kusanuan, Kong district, Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

(3) The Inter-Religious Commission for Development supports the Project for Rural Development by monks in the Northeast.

(4) The co-operation between the Sublime Life Mission, monks, the Club of Sila-Dhamma Teachers of Thailand, and the Ministry of Education in training morality teachers nation-wide for more than 10 years.

35 From interviewing 10 monk followers of Buddhadasa who work in different provinces, it was found that none has ever consulted with Buddhadasa about their work. They go to Suan Mokkh mainly for a visit.

36 Interview with Phra Visuth Visuddhicari, a follower of Buddhadasa's, Santi Maitri Monk Retreat, Surat Thani, June 16, 1987.

that:[37]

> "Suan Mokkh has neither branches nor followers because I have never treated anybody as a follower, everybody is their own teacher, and attainment of dhamma or enlightment cannot be taught."

However, although some groups are growing and cooperating more and more, it does not mean that all of them are centrally linked. There are many monks and lay persons who are still working independently. It should be noted that there is no separation between the groups and the movement. Expansion of the groups is also an expansion of the movement; work of the group is also work of the movement. They accept the same common core, namely Buddhadasa's teaching. Many followers note that the most striking characteristic of Buddhadasa's movement is its free style.[38] But, what should be carefully noted is the need to unite Buddhadasa's followers. An obvious move occurred on the 80th birthday of Buddhadasa when many followers spoke of more cooperation with each another. Thus the appearance of Buddhadasa's movement may change after Buddhadasa passes away.

Since the 1980s Buddhadasa's movement has developed to another stage. There are some phenomena indicating that Buddhadasa's teachings have permeated into the rural areas. Many Buddhadasa's monk-followers working in the countryside villages try to modify and to give new meanings to traditional religious activities and rituals. Slides, shadow movies, etc., are used in training the youth and older people.[39]No doubt, Buddhadasa's teachings were reinterpreted and there is more concern with ethical conduct than with the profound aspects of teaching. The importance of such ethics is its intensive relevance to the daily life and the general social circumstances.

Some young monks improve their method of giving sermons. For example, Phra Phayom Kalyano of Wat Suan-Kaew, Nonthaburi, one of Buddhadasa's followers introduced

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37 Interview with Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, June 1987.

38 Interview with seven monks at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

39 For example, training the youth and general people by slides, shadow movies, pictures at Wat Dong Nong Ped, Chiang Rai and the Meditation Center of Wat Thung Sawang, Ban Phai District, Khon Kaen Province.

a very "modern" way of talking about dhamma in a language understandable and accessible to the youth and men of the modern day.[40] The dhamma recorded cassettes of this young monk became as popular as pop music. They are available in department stores with the total sale numbering hundreds of thousands. His outdoor sermons attracted the public and teenagers more than a music concert. They are so popular that his sermon recorded-cassettes are listened to on local buses and tour buses, teenagers listen to them with their portable sound stereos. It promoted listening to dhamma not only among teenagers but also teachers, students, middle-class and lower-class people without precedence. In 1981, he was invited to preach more than 200 times, mostly to teachers and students.[41] Phra Phayom explained that Buddhadasa's teachings were excellent, but not accessible to most people so his aim was to transmit this message in another "language". Buddhadasa said that he himself had been preaching the dhamma for more than 50 years but still he never gained the acceptance of teenagers the way Phra Phayom did (1980-1990).

From our interview, we found that a number of monks who adopted Buddhadasa's teachings returned to their home villages or hometowns to develop and spread the teachings under various projects such as promoting agriculture and improving irrigation, conservation and reafforestation projects, training the youth by ordaining them as novices during summer, rice and buffalo banks, opposing alcohol and smoking, therapy for drug addicts, vocational training for women, setting day care centers for pre-school children, and school lunch programs. All these activities for improving life and welfare of the people seem part of an attempt to bring sila-tham (morality) back to the society.

A monk helping to develop the village in the Northeast said that "Most of the monks who work for development of the communities in this region accept and propagate

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40 Phra Phayom Kalyano was born into a farmer's family in 1950 in Nonthaburi, near Bangkok. After finishing primary school (4 years), he worked in the filds and constructions. At the age of 20, he was ordained at his village temple and intended to be a monk only for three months. But when he first read Buddhadasa's books he decided to study nak tham (Dhamma Study) for three years. Then he went to stay at Suan Mokkh for seven years (1973-1980). He left and renovated Wat Suan Kaew, an abandoned temple in Nonthaburi into a forest garden like Suan Mokkh and became a popular preacher (See Sumeth Atsawapiriyawong, Phanniti Khongthet, *Phra Payom Kalyano*, Bangkok: unknown publisher, 1986).

41 Ibid., p.24.

Buddhadasa's teachings either directly or indirectly. Nothing deserves undertaking more than training people so that they have an understanding of spiritual life and can improve their standard of living." [42] Although these monks are often opposed by high-ranking traditional, conservative monks in rural areas, they do not think this is a problem. Phra Banyat Anutalo a monk who has engaged with community development project in the Northeast for more than 15 years said "We do not expect any high ecclesiastical position and title, but only want to continue with the ideal of bringing sila-tham back to the people and society. There is something worth fighting for." [43]

In my opinion though, Buddhadasa's teaching contains a dynamic and flexible character which could be transmited from individual to individual or to some larger collectively. But without monk-followers who simplify Buddhadasa's message to suit rural people, Buddhadasa's teaching can only be comprehended and appreciated by the literate people. The development of the movement among the masses would be then unthinkable.

Suan Mokkh as a Centre of Ideology

Suan Mokkh (Garden of Liberation) grew out of the inspiration of Buddhadasa. His intention was to stimulate monks who had already studied the Pali scripture to further think of living in the forest to

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42 Interview with Phra Khamphet Cakravaro, a monk who works and distributes Buddhadasa's teaching in the Northeast in September, 1988.

43 Interview with Phra Bunyat Anutalo, Wat Pa Thammada, Nakhon Ratchasima, 1988.

practice dhamma earnestly and to live closely to nature as monks did during the time of the Buddha. The journal Buddhasasana, announced since its earliest day that Suan Mokkh has no teacher but is only a place for all of those who are interested in practicing dhamma and in searching for their own salvation.[44] Monks who practice differently can also live together. Besides vinaya (the monastic discipline), the principles they hold in common are "plain living and high thinking." [45]

The forest hermitage, Suan Mokkh where Buddhadasa and about 70 monks reside, is located semi-isolated from modern urban life (about five kilometers south of Chaiya district). It illustrates not only Buddhadasa's ideals of propagating the pristine substance of Buddhism in a form which combines the traditional and modern, but also reflects Buddhadasa's attempt to revive the popularity of forest monk tradition in Thailand. Unlike most Thai monasteries, Suan Mokkh has no elaborately decorated temple. Its chapel (boot), where the Sangha performs rites including ordination ceremony, is on the top of a hill with trees as pillars and a canopy of leafy branches as a roof. The vihara (hall) is a semi-circular rock platform under the shade of trees. It is used for preaching, conferences, and welcoming quests. Buddhadasa believes that one must harmonize with nature in order to realize dhamma. Thus Suan Mokkh is preserved with forests, streams, rocks and wildlife so that those who come into contact with it can learn from nature which can help them in understanding what is called "dhamma". Here people, animals, and trees live together harmoniously. Buddhadasa teaches the dhamma on a rock under the shade of a tree; monks and lay people sit on the sand-ground while squirrels are noisily chasing one another in the trees and chickens are scratching the ground looking for food. In the audio tape recording of Buddhadasa's preaching, there are frequently sounds of cocks crowing, and dogs barking in the background. This is another example of life at Suan Mokkh.

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44 The rule for accepting a monk who wants to live in Suan Mokkh is that he must have finished the third level of the Dhamma Study (nak tham _k). However, Buddhadasa later found that there were many monks who had not taken the Dhamma Study but were earnest in earnest in practicing dhamma. In such cases, Buddhadasa will specially consider accepting them (Interview with Dhammadasa, Chaiya, 1988).

45 Interview with Phra Pho Jantasaro, the deputy abbot of Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

The focus of the hermitage, however, is a modern building which is called "spiritual theater." It is the large, two-storey auditorium where Buddhist teaching is propagated through slides, films, and more than 900 paintings of religious puzzle pictures from Theravada and Mahayana traditions as well as other religions, appear on the inner side of the walls. All around outside walls of the theater are reliefs illustrating the life history of Buddha. these were reproduced from photographs of the ancient Indian Buddhist sculptures at Sanchi, Bharhut, Amaravati, and Buddhakaya.[46] This was Buddhadasa's attempt to make a study of Buddhism to be enjoyable. Those who come to study dhamma or just visit Suan Mokkh for a short period can understand the dhamma easily through such media. In some senses, it is a part of conservation of the traditional dhamma teaching method, that is, Buddhism was taught to ordinary people through pictures because in the past the majority of people were illiterate.

It seems that various things within Suan Mokkh was made an object for dhamma teaching where the path to attain the ultimate goal of Buddhism are expressed in many forms such as the Nalike Pond: a big pond having a small island with a coconut tree at its center. It is explained that nibbana lies within the vicious circle of life (samsara) and that extinction of suffering is to be done amidst suffering. Buddhadasa built it according to the message of a local lullaby, as a memorial to the moral standards and wisdom of past generations who understood dhamma profoundly that they could express "nibbana" through a children's lullaby.

Another prominent statue is Avalokitesvara Bodhisatva which was not made as an idol to worship in response to superstitious beliefs, rather it was made an object for reflection on the dhamma virtues of the Bodhisatva, namely purity, wisdom, friendliness, and tolerance (suddhi, panna, metta, khanti). One of the most important place is Sala Dhammaghosana, a one-storey building which has all of Buddhadasa's books, tapes etc. Here too is where Buddhadasa will be buried among his works which will be proof of his immortality. Moreover, there is a house of plasterwork where dhamma dolls, coin banks, stickers, and balloons are made for giving children who visit Suan Mokkh and promise to be "good". Also

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46 Santikaro Bhikkhu, *Life and Work of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*. (Bangkok: Foundation for Children, dated unknown), p. 17.

here are thousands of packs of cigarettes, liqour bottles, opium pipes, cards, and other different types of gambling equipment in a large heap. They used to belong to those who now have been converted and have given them up. There are no donation boxes and no rites concerning sacred things because they were considered by Buddhadasa as disturbed things.[47]

Monks at Suan Mokkh lead a simple life according to dhamma-vinaya. They live in small, relatively isolated dwellings spread throughout a wooded hillside of over 150 acres, going out to receive the morning alms, eating once a day from their alms bowls, bathing in a stream, chanting, and devoting their time to meditation practice as well as physical work such as construction, sculpture, drawing, producing teaching materials, training children, giving lectures to people who visit Suan Mokkh and other works.[48] They are encouraged to encounter everything carefully and scrutinize it in all regards, no matter what they are doing: working, eating, seeing, listening, socializing, and not even resting is without its duty. All are regarded as learning and practicing dhamma, so that one can know everything as it is and can be mindful in all steps of life until they realize the truth. However, that does not mean that the monks seclude themselves and do not contact each other. On the contrary, they work together, helping the sick among them, and giving encouragement for dhamma practice or work.

At Suan Mokkh there are no classrooms, everybody studies alone. Buddhadasa preaches for everybody. He has no time to teach anybody privately as in other temples. He regards that living, working are in themselves an education; it is learning from reality. This is the true knowledge, the knowledge that lead to right understanding (samma-dhitthi) and right conduct (samma-kammanta). The "path" of enlightenment is not apart from a routine daily life. To study Buddhism one must learn from life and everyday work because dhamma is the reality of life. Buddhadasa emphasizes that dhamma and life can never be separated, since

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47 At Suan Mokkh there are no donation boxes. People who visit Suan Mokkh and want to donate, they can do so with Buddhadasa or his assistants. Every donator will recieve the book of Buddhadasa.

48 At Suan Mokkh, there is a "Labor Day" for every seven days. Monks will labor together in digging ditches, constructing roads, building construction, etc.

they are one.[49] Working is dhamma practice if the work is purposefully done well, it will be accompanied with a level of orders, mindfulness, and wisdom.[50] Ritual, chanting, and meditation all took second place to the primary obligations. The essence of Buddhism cannot be learnt through reading, listening, or speculating, but only through actions and from actions. Buddhadasa maintains that in life and work there exist all kinds of dhamma.

It appears that Buddhadasa regards independence, self-responsibility, and self-training as the most significant bases of learning, practicing and development of intelligence and ability so that the latter two can be their teachers or refuge. Enlightment is a matter of people who have trained themselves well. Obediance and conformity are not required by Buddhadasa. Each monk has to responsible for himself, solve his own problems; there is no predetermined set of solutions. They are independent in setting regulations for himself and in developing themselves according to his own personality and readiness. One's personality and potentiality are considered by Buddhadasa as what can be improved, corrected, and developed endlessly. The answer to the questions on life and religion are found within an individual's ability. However, conservation of the Sangha tradition and preservation of one own's credit as a monk are always emphasized.

Places devoted to dhamma practice in order to track the arahants' footsteps (perfected man) like Suan Mokkh have few regulations. "Buddhadasa wants everybody to live independently without such words as "rules" and there are no list of rules with its fairly precise prescriptions of norms of behavior or punishments at Suan Mokkh" said his followers. [51] Certainly, there are some problems. Most of them, however, said that they were pleased to live in such a way.[52] Pha Maha Jamrat Sukawaro, a monk who take part in producing

49 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Thamma-banyaai Ladap Mahawittayalai* [Dhamma Lectures of Students Vol.1.] (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1983), p. 249.

50 According to Buddhadasa in life and work there are happiness and suffering, rightness and wrongness, gain and loss, losing and winning etc. All these teach people the truth of life (anicca, dukkha, anatta or impermanent, suffering and emptiness) and how to obtain peacefulness.

51 Interview Phra Varasak Varadhammo at Suan Mokkh, March 1988.

52 Interview with seven monks at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

dhamma teaching materials at Suan Mokkh and has stayed there for five years said that:[53]

> At Suan Mokkh both monks and novices do all kind of hard work, even the lowest. We work without anybody thanking us, for working is self training for perserverence, sacrifice and elimination of selfishness. We work without wanting to demand our rights, only have the right to do our duty as human beings. Working without demanding a right creates excess results for others.

Phra Maha Pratheep, one of the most advocated monk in propagating Buddhadasa's teaching at Wat Chonpathan recounted that Buddhadasa always told monks who worked together at Suan Mokkh that "For the work you are doing, no matter how hard it is or how exhausted you become I will not give you anything in return, not even a word of thanks. It is not only myself who is "Buddhadasa" (servant of the Buddha) but all of you too.[54]

Those who really want an advice from Buddhadasa can have one whenever they meet him. His advice, however, is always given based on the principles of dhamma and broad theoretical aspects rather than going to the root of the problem. Two lay-followers who are medical doctors and come to practice dhamma at Suan Mokkn said that "Buddhadasa wants people who practice dhamma do not question but study, train themselves, observe, and watch the occurrence such as thoughts, feelings, desires, and the influence of the outside environment on their minds. They have to think of solving problems and overcoming obstacles which are in a sense the best teachers and the best tests for intelligence."[55] Following are examples of the people whose thoughts and ideals were influenced by Suan Mokkh.

First is a monk who plays an important role in spreading the dhamma in the South. He said that after having traditionally been ordained for three months he prepared to disrobe.

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53 Interview of Pha Maha Jamrat Sukawaro, at Suan Mokkh, 1988. He is 29 years old and has been ordained for 8 years in the Northeast. He finished elementary school for 4 years. After finished the third level of the Dhamma Study he went to Suan Mokkh to practice dhamma.

54 Interview of Phra Maha Pratheep Uttamapanno at Wat Chonprathan, Nonthaburi Province, August 1988.

55 Interview of Ms.Kanneka Benjapong and Ms.Sermsrup Damrongrat, both are dortors at Saraburi Province, Suan Mokkh 1987.

Before the time of disrobing he arranged the books in his temple to set up a library and found Buddhadasa's book Handbook For Mankind. It has many interesting thought-provoking things in it. He went to Suan Mokkh thinking to stay for only seven days before disrobing. He experienced the natural atmosphere at Suan Mokkh, the simplicity of monk's way of living, Buddhadasa's preaching, and working hard with other monks. He read more of Buddhadasa's books especially The Buddha's History in His Own Words which impressed him the most. Finally, he decided not to disrobe and stayed at Suan Mokkh for seven years (1972-1979). He said that:[56]

> Suan Mokkh provides freedom for everybody in learning, correcting oneself, self-training, and self-development according to one's own readiness and method. There are no rules other than the vinaya. There is no coercion and no punishment. My thinking and my mind have changed a lot since the first year. My ideal of loving others and devoting myself to Buddhism started here and roots deeper and deeper into my conciouness. I left Suan Mokkh to start my own temple and to work according to my own thoughts. Buddhadasa and myself do not think alike but we have the same goal and ideal.

A second example is a monk who has played a significant role in rural development of the Northeastern Thailand. He was interested in occultism. After having been ordained at the age of 21, he studied nak tham (Dhamma Study) and occultism. He first read Buddhadasa's books Handbook For Mankind and Stupidity which reminded him of his own deeds and the goal of ordination. The Treasure in The Buddha's Words is the book that caused him to abandon occultism and went to Suan Mokkh in 1965. The simple life of the monks who live at Suan Mokkh and their dedication, Buddhadasa's teaching and his joining in work with other monks, all these strongly affected him. He joined all kinds of work with them, breaking and grinding rocks with a hand-tools, digging the ground, bending iron rods, and constructing buildings, etc. He then came to realize that work is life, and working is practicing the dhamma. It is the spirit of developments. He said that:[57]

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56 Interview with Phra Visuth Visuddhicari, Satimaitree Temple, Surat Thani, on June 16, 1987. Phra Visut is 46 years old. He finished high school, has played a significant role in propagating Buddhadasa's teachings among the youth, students, and government officials through summer ordination of novices and ordination of Buddhist nans. Annually this temple holds no less than 3-5 big training programs.

57 Interview with Phra Banyat Anuttaro of the Wat Pa Thammada Bua Yai District, Nakhon Ratchasima, July 1987. He is 52 years old having, finished the fourth grade of primary education.

> The love of work is the spirit I acquired from Suan Mokkh. I lived there for five years, then I left to develop my own village in 1970. Nobody, besides Buddhadasa, stay at Suan Mokkh for too many years. Everybody leaves with a new spirit and ready for new initiatives. If you ask how I came to have the ideal of working for rural development, you can write down that it came from Suan Mokkh.

From our observation, the general routine of monks at Suan Mokkh is the traditional routine of monks in many temples in Thailand. It should be noted that not all of the monks at Suan Mokkh join these programs. Some of them eat where they work and chant in their own kutis.

4:30 a.m.	Performing morning chanting together.
6:00 a.m.	Going on alms rounds (on returning every monk will leave the food at the dining hall, then take a bath and rest before eating).
8:00 a.m.	Eating together at the dining hall (once a day). Every monk sits in accord with their seniority, which is by the number of the years ordained. Pots of rice and food are passed on a trolley in front of each monk. A monk will put as much rice and food in his alms bowl as he will eat for that meal. Then the pot of food will be passed on without a return.
9:30 a.m.	After the monks' eat and clean alms bowls, a senior monk sometimes talk to younger monks, asking them to live and follow the dhamma-vinaya (when Buddhadasa was still healthy he would take this time to preach, give advice on practicing dhamma, talk to other monks, and exchange ideas with them).
10:30 a.m.	Taking a rest as desired (but no sleeping). Some monks read, work or seclude themselves.
16:30 p.m.	Light work such as cleaning huts or walking paths before bathing.
17:00 p.m.	Gathering together at the preaching house for 17:30 p.m. Evening

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He plays a significant role in stimulating the monks of the new generation in the Northeast to be interested in developing their own communities. Current rural develoment are buffalo bank, rice bank, reforestation project, day care centers.

chanting. (When Buddhadasa was still healthy, there would be preaching everyday at this time, especially during the Buddhist Lent).

At present, arranging a forest garden like Suan Mokkh has become a model for providing lodging for monks who want to lead their lives like that during the Buddha's time. This arrangement seems to be appropriate for the present is appropriate for socio-economic condition as well. There are many monks who are attempting to modify their own temples into a form of a natural forest monastic centre like that in the Buddha's time.

For the lay people living at Suan Mokkh emphasis is placed on simplicity and not too much convenience. There is still a permanent separation between monks and lay people at Suan Mokkh. However, it can be noted that there are many activities in which they cooperate closely; and even Buddhadasa himself joins in.[58] Suan Mokkh has also been receiving more groups of people wanting to study dhamma or coming for a temporary visit every year. There are guest houses which can accommodate more than 1,000 lay people (men and women have to stay separately). Also, hundreds of newly ordained monks are trained every year. Foreigners from more than 20 countries come here to study dhamma. A ten day basic meditation course is arranged for them at the beginning of every month, and over 150 of them are trained annually. In 1983, the break-down of Suan Mokkh visitors were as follows:[59]

Table 1 Suan Mokkh Visitors for 1983

Visitors	Amount (people)
Daytime visitors	116,044
Visitors staying overnight	15,159
(classified into:)	
general people	7,099
schoolchildren	4,255
monks and novices	1,641
students	1,397

58 For example those activities in which monks and laity have joined together are canal dredging and road building. Especially, construction work at Suan Mokkh over the past 20 years has been accomplished through the voluntary labors of the monks and the laity (both men and women).

59 Pasannashammo Bhikkhu, 1985, p. 193.

teachers/universities/instructors	617
foreigners	150

Table 2 shows the exchange of dhamma recorded tapes at Suan Mokkh from 1982 to 1988. A distinction is made between exchanges by laymen and monks.[60]

Table 2 Exchange of recorded tapes at Suan Mokkh 1982-1988

Years	Numbers of recorded tapes		Total amount
	Laymen	Monks	
1982	3,429	4,676	8,105
1983	8,367	3,789	12,156
1984	11,852	7,025	18,877
1985	12,583	6,470	19,053
1986	15,256	8,637	23,893
1987	15,544	9,484	25,028
1988	16,760	10,157	26,917

Source: List of books of dhamma recorded tapes at Suan Mokkh

60 Every preaching or dhamma lecture by Buddhadasa is recorded on a big reel of tape. After that it is transferred onto one hour casettes which are categorized by the topic. Each topic is made for those who are interested, for example, those who can read slowly or are illiterate and those who do not have time to read. The principle for those who exchange tapes is that they have to bring blank tapes to exchange with recorded tapes (there are no tapes for sale). At Suan Mokkh Buddhadasa does not allow any business transaction, even the sale of his own books.

Chapter 6

The Movement and Its Followers

Having attempted to understand the dynamic, the characteristics, and the role of Buddhadasa movement in modern Thai society, we will now examine the social composition of the movement which partly can be derived from an analysis of social background of the followers, including the impact of the movement on their ideas and practices. The social composition of the followers also reflects the actual operation of the movement as well as its ability to expand. The main questions we seek to answer in this chapter are: who are Buddhadasa's followers? what are their social backgrounds? why do they join the movement? what are their perceptions of Buddhadasa's teaching? and what is its impact on them? First, something needs to be said about the nature of data to be used.

The data presented in this chapter has been collected through questionaires, interviews, and personal participation with Buddhadasa's followers over a period of two years (1988/1989). The important instrument was an eleven-page, 43 item-questionnaire developed after I first surveyed and visited Buddhadasa's monk-followers and their activities in six temples in four provinces of Thailand: Surat Thani, Bangkok, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Chiang Mai.[1] I wrote this in Thai language, pretested with monks and laymen at Chiang Mai, and corrected it. The questions were of two kinds: those that were "choice" and those that were "open ended". The interviews were all taped and the recordings were later transcribed. Because of the uncertain size of Buddhadasa's followers, systematic sampling methods were not used. Fifty in-depth interviews (10 monks and 40 laymen) were conducted and generally took place at 6 selected temples.[2] From each selected temple, a sample population from laymen, who indicated that they were interested in or disseminated Buddhadasa's teaching, was selected by taking two persons who came to the temple during a holiday. A sample population of monks was also derived from six temples in four selected provinces. Ten monks

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1 Surat Thani in the South Region is where Suan Mokkh (Buddhadasa's forest monastic centre) is located; Bangkok in the Central Region is where the main propagation centre is established; Nakhon Ratchasima in the Northeast Region and Chiang Mai in the North Region were selected as areas of field research because here, a more active followers hold their community development activities.

2 Six selected temples as follow: Suan Mokkh and Santi Mitre in Surat Thani, Thammasthan in Bangkok, Wat Pa Thammada in Nakhon Ratchasima, and Wat Umong and Wat Pha-laad in Chiang Mai.

who had launched activities in towns, districts, and villages were selected, half of them were abbots of temples. The interviews took an average of about three hours: the longest was eight hours, the shortest was just under two hours. The interviews followed the items in the questionaire, but the actual order of topics was fairly flexible. I wrote the answers out as fully as possible without interrupting the flow of talk, and recorded the interview on tape as well. Most of interviews were carried out in a pleasant atmosphere. Much useful data was gathered through indirect observation. It did not take me long to realize that many interviewees wanted to teach me about Buddhadasa's teaching. Some interviewees took me to be a Buddhadasa's follower.

The characteristics of Buddhadasa movement will be taken as a starting-point not only for answering the question about what the movement actually seeks to do, but for understanding how the movement tries to express it.

Characteristics of the Buddhadasa Movement

Buddhadasa movement originated and developed under affiliation with the Thai Sangha. Even though his interpretation of Buddhism seems deeply unorthodox and opposed to the traditional teaching, his theory of double meaning of language, which argues for two perspectives of interpretation and understanding of Buddhism enables the retention of traditional modes of understanding. This is probably the way Buddhadasa is posing his challenge against the Sangha and carry his message into Thai society. Though Buddhadasa has strongly critized the traditional Thai Sangha, he has never rejected the authority of the Sangha.

Buddhadasa's movement, a religious movement, aiming at returning to the original meaning of the doctrine as well as a strategy to adjust Buddhism to the needs of the modern word, has often been characterized as an intellectual movement. The movement shows little interest in bringing about structural change within the Sangha, neither in building up an effective organization nor a special system for itself. The dominant feature of the movement lies in Buddhadasa's interpretation of the Pali Canon; and emphasizes attaining the heart of

Buddhism rather than relying on the different appearence and details of monastic discipline and practice. The legitimacy of the movement rests on Buddhadasa's interpretion of Buddhist doctrine.

Another striking characteristic of Buddhadasa's movement is its organization. As I have already discussed, standards of doctrine and attempts to enforce moral purity have largely been devalued by Buddhadasa (see Chapter 5). All followers have to be responsible for themselves. This trend seems likely to continue, with an increasingly fluid type of organization in which many special purpose sub-groups form and disband. The movement has proved to be a relatively loosely knit association, so informal in its organization that many of its followers were led to believe that it has no "organization" and that it did not exist as a "separate" group. This was felt to be true because there is no committee, no bureaucratic officials, no legislature; no regular pledges of financial support were organized; and no efforts were made to formulate an explicit creed of beliefs and practices. Suan Mokkh plays the role of being the center of Buddhist ideology rather than functions as an administrative headquarters with branch offices. Moreover, there is no membership list, and no tests of any sort for distinguishing those who were acceptable for membership from those who were not. I use the word "membership" but actually the movement has no "members". Phra Pho Jantasaro, the deputy abbot of Suan Mokkh, said that "Buddhadas movement", is not an organization ...there is no member, you can't join; you can't resign....you are either in or out by the quality of the life you live."[3]

Nobody knows or can tell how many scattered followers or "disciples" Buddhadasa has. There is no membership list, and no record concerning the number of the followers or where they are found. Even if one were to attempt such a count, it is important to recognize the diversity of followers, ranging from monks, active followers, sympathisers to some people who are interested in only certain aspects of Buddhadasa's teachings. Moreover, it is impossible to estimate the number of people who, while living in their own homes and employed in "outside"jobs devote almost all of their spare time to promoting Buddhadasa's teaching by their own methods in their own localities.

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3 Interview with Phra Pho Jantasaro, the deputy abbot of Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

Asked by an author at Suan Mokkh in 1988 concerning the network of the movement and the number of disciples, Buddhadasa replied that: "That we don't know, we keep no records. We received a number of letters which expressed thankfulness for the benefit they gain from our books. Most letters come from monks."[4] He also insisted that Suan Mokkh has no branch, no disciple or member. Those who lead their lives with "correct understanding" (samma-ditthi) are disciples whether they know Suan Mokkh or not, and those who do not lead such kind of life are not disciples even if they may claim to be.

From the above point of view, however, it is not to say that there is no organization within the movement, or no plans, or cooperative activities and projects. Indeed, various groups and foundations have been established by monks and lay devotees for spreading Buddhadasa's message into society such as setting up a meditation center, a printing press, and supporting publications and dissemination. Workers in such groups were not assigned or appointed by anybody; they voluntarily followed their own interests and skills. The activities of the groups have continued through their own capital and labor. Through their work the Buddhadasa movement appear as a more formal and tightly coordinated movement. However, it can be noted that the groups never acquired the formality of an organization, lacking even the mechanism by which a cohesive self-disciplined group of religious functionaries might be maintained. The movement does not allow any sense of centralized organization. The leaders of the workers arise from acceptance of others or from benefit of their having worked so long that they become an expert and can skillfully employ the resources.

Another striking fact are the sources of funds used to maintain any of the movement activities. It appears that there is no formal solicitation of funds among followers. Neither Buddhadasa nor his followers felt it necessary to reveal the sources of funds received. Certainly, all funds came from donations. In addition, by various accounts given by followers, one is led to conclude that most of those who were active paid their own way or were helped in various informal ways.

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4 Interview with Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

Buddhadasa's movement is often taken note of by many persons, including, Prawase Wasi, himself a follower of Buddhadasa's, as lacking in systematization or modern organization.[5] Phra Bhodhirak, the leader of the Santi- Asoka movement (a Buddhist movement in contemporary Thailand), criticized Buddhadasa movement because it cannot establish a large organization to propagate its doctrines systematically and cannot assess its work to make sure that the doctrines are seriously practiced.[6]On this matter, Buddhadasa commented that: [7]

> "To make people understand the teachings more is organization itself. Right understanding is power. The need to do similar things enables people to get together themselves without conditions. And when they do not gather together, they have no conflicts. This is a natural organization."

It is rather obvious that Buddhadasa's movement emphasizes attaining the heart of Buddhism. What is significant for the movement is Buddhadasa's teachings, not how they are spread. The disseminators of the teachings arise from the teachings. The existence and expansion of the movement has more to do with the dissemination of the teachings more than the organizational growth. In fact, the teachings and the organizational form of the movement are seperate. The movement, moreover, neither rely on superficial appearance and details of the vinaya (the monastic discipline) nor establish a specific form or system for itself. There is no externally apparent practice like ceremony, trivial regulations, or particular dressing. Buddhadasa said that:[8]

> "For the people who went out to be ordained and become enlightened in the Buddha's time, their Buddhism was completely formless and riteless; there was only the attained truth. For Buddhists today, there are only pattern, ceremony, and sacredness.

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5 Interview of Dr. Prawase Wasi at Suan Mokkh, March 1987. Mr. Prawase is a medical doctor who devote himself to the health development programms in rural areas in the Northeast of Thailand. He was a recipient of Magsaysay award in 1980s. He is now the Dean of the Public Health Faculty, Mahidol University, Bangkok.

6 Interview with Phra Bhodhirak at Santi Asoka, Bangkok, 1988.

7 Interview of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu at Suan Mokkh, July 1988.

8 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Tua-ku Khong-ku* [I-Mine] (Bangkok: Suwichan, 1962), p.12.

These characteristics and statements convey the idea that Buddhadasa's movement is to be a movement within Thai Theravada Buddhism which is drawn from the Sangha, resembling a new ascetic denomination or in a sectarian sense. The movement is probably the largest religious movement in contemporary Thailand which has no formal organizational machinery. In this characteristic can be seen that Buddhadasa's movement took no step towards challenging any of the established Sangha with an organization of its own.

Some scholars, such as Sulak Sivarak, frequently refer to the followers of Buddhadasa as "unorganized masses". They assumed that this characteristic diversity partly resulted from the unsectarian objective of the movement. But such a pronouncement does not lead to a better understanding of the background and characteristics of Buddhadasa's followers. In our study it is important to be able to offer some possible aspects understanding about the structure and function of the "unorganized masses".

Followers can be characterized into two main groups: monks and laymen. This division has a significant implication. The data suggest that there are considerable differences in the social backgrounds of the two groups. This distinction accounts for the different role of monks and laymen in the development of the movement. For example, there are a number of Buddhadasa's monk-followers who came from peasant families and most of them have been engaged in community development in their home town or village. This group plays a crucial role as a bridge to take Buddhadasa's teachings to the rural areas, where villagers are the vast majority of the population of Thailand. This dimension of rural expansion of the movement is often overlooked. At the same time the lay-followers, who live in urban areas, promote Buddhadas's teachings among people around them. Thus the social background of the two groups will be considered and some comparisons between them highlighted.

Social Background of the Followers

Regional Distribution of Buddhadasa's Followers

One important piece of information provided by our research sample is the regional

distribution of Buddhadasa's followers, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Distribution of Buddhadasa's Sampled Followers by Regions

Region	Number		Total	Percent
	Monks	Laymen		
Central	-	-	21	42
Bangkok	-	17	-	-
Others	1	3	-	-
South	3	9	12	24
North	2	9	11	22
Northeast	3	1	4	8
East	1	1	2	4
Total	10	40	50	100

Followers of the Buddhadasa movement are spread through all regions of Thailand therefore the research sample has been drawn purposively to reflect the distribution of followers. The Central Region, particularly Bangkok, contains the largest number. In the South, where the movement originated, and the North where Buddhadasa's followers first launched the propagation of Buddhadasa's teaching are found the remaining sample (24 and 22 per cent respectively). The proportion of the followers in the two regions are very similar. They are nearly less than one half of those in the Central Region. The uneven concentration of the movement throughout the country partly reflects the ways in which the movement expanded. For example, we found that Budddadasa's teaching is hardly rooted in the rural areas. But at the same time, there is a strong impact of the Buddhadasa movement at the village level. This is reflected in the Northeast where although the number of Buddhadasa's followers is small, monks have been particularly successful in their village development activities such as rice banks, buffalo banks, cooperative shops, and day care centres (See Chapter 7). These activities emphasize the role that villagers have played in development. There are a number of villages where alcohol is not consumed, and there is no gambling and "worldly" entertainment. The people are striving to gradually solve their economic problems, and to live in a healthy environment. As we shall see Buddhadasa's teaching was further interpreted and adapted to the specific problems of village life.

To some extent, the relative number of Buddhadasa's followers is socially insignificant. In order to understand the impact of the Buddhadasa movement on Thai society, the degree of penetration, or involvement has to be considered as well. When we consider the degree of expansion of the movement in terms of the number of followers, Buddhadasa's movement appears to be more wide spread in the north than the northeast. But in terms of penetration, the north lags behind the northeast. Variation in the degree of penetration between regions may be largly explained as a result of the strength, social status, personal characteristics, and the presence of followers.

A significant finding concerning regional distribution of our sample emerges when we consider the place of origin (rural and urban) from which the followers came.

Table 4 Place of Origin: Rural versus Urban

	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
Rural	9	4	3	26
Urban	1	36	37	74
Total	10	40	50	100

The above figures indicate that the majority of our sample (74 per cent) are of urban origin. But the largest proportion of them (72 per cent) are laymen, and only two per cent are monks. A further 26 per cent are from farm families who have spent the greater part of their early lives in villages. Table 4 gives some support to the assumption that the majority of the followers are urbanized. Moreover, ninety per cent of our monk sample (nine out of ten) are of rural origin. This is linked to the level of their education. Examination of the data in more detail suggests that half of the monk followers (five out of ten) live and work in villages. This reflects the general rural orientation of the Buddhadasa movement.

Sex Composition and Marital Status

There is a slight sex imbalance among the followers sampled. That is the movement

appears to contain more male than female (male 54 and female 46 per cent). The slight dominance of men refects the importance of monks in the expansion of the movement. This was offset by the fact that among lay-followers the number of women appears to exceed the number of men.

Table 5 Sex Distribution of Buddhadasa's Followers

	Male	Female	Number	Percent
Monks	10	-	10	20
Laymen	17	23	40	80
Total	27	23	50	-
Percent	54	46	-	100

Based on field observation, it appears that most of the women followers are more highly educated and wealthy. They also play a prominant role in the movement for instance, as lecturers in dhamma practice courses, organizers of financial support and activities, publication, translation of Buddhadasa's teachings into English and so on.

While both men and women have played an active role in the growth of the movement, their marital status is very interesting. That is the proportion of married and single is equal (46 per cent were married and 46 per cent were single) and 8 per cent were widowed. The relatively high proportion of single may not be surprising for religious movements.

When we consider only the lay-followers we found that the number of married is much more than single (46 per cent were married, 26 per cent were single, and 8 per cent widowed). The number of single females is double that of single males (10 per cent were single male and 22.5 per cent were single female). But the proportion of married and widowed between men and women was nearly equal (27.5 per cent married male, 30 per cent married female; widowed male and female were equal, 4 per cent). This figure rejects the generalization of the movement that the majority of Buddhadasa's followers are youths. Moreover, the high proportion of married ones reflects that Buddhadasa's followers are not so far removed from ordinary men.

Table 6 Marital Status of Buddhadasa's Followers

	Monks	Laymen		Total	Percent
		Male	Female		
Single	10	4	9	23	46
Married	-	11	12	23	46
Widowed	-	2	2	4	8
Total	10	17	23	50	100
Percent	20	34	46	-	100

Age Distribution of Buddhadasa's Followers

Age distribution may be a significant index of the state of the movement. As Table 7 shows, the movement attracts people from all age groups and appears to spread more into the older age groups. However, half of the sample (50 per cent) are under fifty years and another half (50 per cent) are fifty years and over. Thus it is not heavily skewed towards either the younger or older age groups. This partly substantiates the movement's claim that they do not work with the concept "target group" in terms of a particular age group or at least Buddhadasa's teaching do not appeal to a special age group alone.

Table 7 Age Distribution

Age	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
70 +	-	5	5	10
60-69	-	8	8	16
50-59	4	8	12	24
40-49	3	7	10	20
30-39	1	7	8	16
20-29	2	5	7	14
Total	10	40	50	100
Average age	43.6	49.9	48.6	-

One might expect that the movement, which has existed for a generation, would cease to attract youths. But it appears that the movement continues to attract youths in considerable numbers, while at the same time it remains relevant to adults. The striking figure in Table 7 is the average age of the followers is so high (48.6 years). Particularly, the average age of lay-followers is higher than monks (49.9 and 43.6 years).

Table 8 Age on Joining the Movement

Age	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
60+	-	1	1	2
50-59	-	3	3	6
40-49	-	8	8	16
30-39	1	8	9	18
20-29	8	12	20	40
20-	1	8	9	18
Total	10	40	50	100
Average age	23.4	32.4	30.6	-

Thus, though the average age of the sample tends to be high, but most of elder group tend to be well educated and wealthier than others. Though age difference often manifest themselves in difference of social experience. But it appears that different age group in the movement are associated with each other. The old age group seems not to be an obstacle in the development of the movement. In contrast, both older monks and laymen actually are the main sources of support for the younger generation in propagating the movement. They said that "for them are now old, but they were "new men" in their own eras".[9]

Education, Occupation, and Income

There are three general criteria noted here for estimating social status: education, occupation, and income. Under education, the data demonstrates that Buddhadasa's followers are found at all educational levels, although they appear to be drawn disproportionately from the highly educated and the not-formally educated categories. The largest proportion of the sample (48 per cent) are university graduates and post graduates. This highly educated group consist almost exclusively of the laymen. A further 16 per cent had been educated up to High School and College; 18 per cent had received education up to Secondary school, and the remaining 14 per cent had some Primary school. It should be noted that half of the monk-followers (50 per cent) were educated only in Primary school. Four per cent of the sample had received no-formal education though they could read and write the Thai language.

Table 9 Educational Attainment

	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
University	1	23	24	48
High School & College	2	6	8	16
Secondary School	2	7	9	18
Primary School	5	2	7	14
No-formal Education	-	2	2	4
Total	10	40	50	100

With reference to the distribution of occupations, the greatest number of the sample

9 Interviewed with Mr. Chun Sirorot, Chiang Mai, 1988.

were officials (46 per cent). The second largest proportion were "monks" (20 per cent). Another 14 per cent were employed in the private service sector; a further 8 per cent were students; 2 per cent were traders; and 8 per cent were others (a farmer, a carpenter, a tailor and a house wife).

Table 10 Occupation

	Number	Percent
Government Officials	23	46
Private Service	7	14
Monks	10	20
Students	4	8
Traders	2	4
Others	4	8
Total	50	100

In general terms, "government official" implies employment by government which includes professionals; university lecturers, doctors, judges, lawyers, teachers, nurses. As this category is used in Thailand, it usually connotes high and middle occupational status. Another broad category, private service is used in contrast to government officials. It implies employment by private enterprises, firms, banks, colleges and will be taken here to involve middle occupational status. The categories "monk" and "student", the former in Thai society is accepted as a special status, may be here regarded as middle status. The latter, since all of them come from urban middle stata families, will have good prospects for future careers. The remaining categories trader, and others will be taken as reflecting lower occupational status.

It should be noted that the data supplied on occupation was not always sufficient to determine their social status, for "trader" may be wealthier or richer than some officials.

But one can say from our sample that the followers are heavily skewed in the direction of high and middle status. 88 per cent of the sample can be said to belong to upper-middle and middle class occupational status.

Another important determinant of social status is the level of income. The income shown in Table 11 is based on an approximate monthly individual income.

Table 11 Income Distribution (in Baht)

	Total	Percent
7000-10000	17	34
4000-6999	11	22
1000-3999	6	12
Under 1000	2	4
No income	14	28
Total	50	100

As regards income, the highest proportion are those who estimated their income between 7,000 to 10,000 baht per month (34 per cent) a range covering university lecturers, doctors, judges, and bankers. Nearly one quarter of the followers (22 per cent) earned between 4,000 and 7,000 baht. This group belongs to lawyers, teachers, nurses, and retired officials. A further 12 per cent reported their income between 1,000 to 3,999 baht, this range covered traders, chief clerks, the tailor, and the carpenter. The lowest income group (4 per cent) earned under 1,000 baht (the farmer and house wife). At the end of the scale, over one quarter of the sample (28 per cent), namely monks and students, had no regular income.

So far we have analysed the social composition of Buddhadasa's followers in terms of separated sets of variables. Each of them provided us with a criterion for dividing the followers into distinctive categories. These figures suggested that there is a highly significant association between places of origin, education, occupation, and income level. Someone who is "high" on one of these tends to be high on the others. This leads to the conclusion that the movement attracted people in all regions and from a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds. However, the largest group in the movement is well-educated, urban, drawn from the upper-middle to middle strata of Thai society.

Why People Join the Movement

The previous section, which analyzed the social background of Buddhadasa's followers, provides an essential step toward a clear understanding of the movement. We now turn to answer why people join the movement and how they become committed to it. We will also attempt to ascertain what their perceptions of Buddhadasa's teachings are as well as the impact of his teachings on their personal lives. Before considering the factors that led people to join the movement, however, we must note the manner in which they were first attracted to it. The following figures provide some insights into this preliminary inquiry.

Table 12 Reasons which most influenced committment to the Movement.

Reasons	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
Read about Buddhadasa's books	10	37	47	94
Went to visit Suan Mokkh	-	3	3	6
Total	10	40	50	100

The figures in Table 12 show rather clearly that most interviewees joined Buddhadasa's movement after reading his books. Indeed, ninety-four per cent of the respondents indicated that they initially became attracted to the movement through Buddhadasa's books. Only 6 per cent reported that they had joined the movement after visiting Suan Mokkh, after which they began to read Buddhadasa's books as well. Thus, although the movement attracts individuals from a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, the path into the movement is through reading. This also accounts for the higher number of followers who are literate.

Another factor which plays an important role in drawing people into the the movement is personal relationships, whether with friends, relatives, or monks who have come into touch with the movement, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13 First Means of Acqaintance with Buddhadasa's Teachings

Sources	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
Books, Journal, Tape-recordings obtained from:				
Book-stores, Libraries	3	6	9	18

Friends, Relatives, Monks	7	31	38	76
Buddhadasa's Sermons at Suan Mokkh	-	3	3	6
Total	10	40	50	100

From our data we found that most of our respondents (76 per cent) first came in contact with Buddhadasa's teachings through books, journal, and tapes provided by personal acquaintainces. Another 18 per cent first came into contact with Buddhadasa's teachings through his books, which they obtained from book stores and libraries. The remaining 6 per cent joined Buddhadasa's movement after hearing his sermons at Suan Mokkh.

Table 14 Previous Religious Interest

Degree of Interest*	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
No Interest	-	28	28	56
Little Interest	10	8	18	36
Great Interest	-	4	8	16

(*This classification scheme was derived from the interviewees'expression)

Table 14 shows a large number of interviewees (56 per cent), mostly laymen, expressed no interest in traditional Buddhism before they became interested in Buddhadasa's teachings because they believed traditional Buddhism had little or no meaning applied to their everyday lives and was rather more concentrated on ceremonies. However, these interviewees did not express opposition to traditional Buddhist teachings and practices. Another 36 per cent expressed a slight interest, including all the monks in our sample (20 per cent); while only 8 per cent of the laymen expressed a great interest. Surprisingly, no monk in the sample expressed a strong interest in traditional Buddhism. These figures reflect partly the small role that traditional forms of Thai Buddhism played in the lives of our sample population.

Table 15 Year of Joining the Movement

Year	Monks	Laymen	Total	Percent
1977-1986	4	16	20	40
1967-1976	3	10	13	26

1957-1966	3	8	11	22
1947-1956	-	5	5	10
1937-1946	-	1	1	2
Total	10	40	50	100

The above figures not only provide information on the year our interviewees joined the movement but also provide some insight into the nature of the growth of the movement. As the figures show for each peroid a different social group (i.e., monks, laymen) accounted for increases in the number of people who joined the movement (For a more detailed discussion, see chapter 5). Interestingly, while Buddhadasa's movement has existed for a generation, it still continues to attract people, be they monks or laymen.

The circumstances which lead our respondents to join the movement are very diverse, and the impact of movement on them is difficult to quantify. Therefore a brief examination of number of case histories provides further insights. In order to flesh out the impact that educational levels, religious backgrounds, socio-economic status, occupation, and gender may have on the decision to join the movement, our case studies will focus on four different cases which illustrate and are representative of these different variables in our 50 interviewee sample.

A first example is Phra Banyat Anuttaro, an abbot of Wat Pa-Thammada, Bua Yai district, Nakhon Ratchasima.[10] He is 52 years old, having finished the fourth grade of primary education, and the first grade of dhamma study (nak tham ek). He set up rural develoment projects in his village including a buffalo bank, rice bank, and day care center. Phra Banyat plays a significant role in stimulating the monks of the new generation in the Northeast to be interested in developing their own communities. He recounted that he was interested in occultism since he was a young man. He was ordained at the age of 21, and after finishing dhamma study he learnt occultism in earnest for 2 years. It was only during his second year of study into the occult that he received from an elderly monk Buddhadasa's books <u>Handbook for Mankind</u> and <u>Stupidity</u>. According to Phra Banyat, the first time he read these books he

10 Interview with Phra Banyat Anuttaro at Wat Pa Thammada, Bua Yai district, Nahkon Ratchasima, July 1987.

thought he had found the most authentic Buddhist teaching because it so clearly explained spiritual doctrine, something which he had never encountered before.

For the sake of clarity, we have provided below some excerpts from the interview, which have been arranged topically. This will also be done in the presentation of the other three case studies.

(i) Phra Banyat's understanding of Buddhadasa's teaching:

> The two books of Buddhadasa (Handbook of Mankind and Stupidity) reminded me of my own deeds and the goal of ordination. It raised a lot of questions in my mind. The Treasure in The Buddha's Words most strongly attacks monks who are occultists. It is the book that changed my life. I abandoned absolutely occultism. The effectiveness of Buddhadasa's teaching lies in its spiritual meaning. His teaching expressed the truth of life in several aspects which is constantly demonstrated in simple language. It brings about a new spirit and new state of mind. I read all Buddhadasa's books available before going to Suan Mokkh with my friends in 1965.

(ii) Phra Banyat's experience at Suan Mokkh:

> Buddhadasa welcomed us by saying that "Here is nothing, there is no master, no disciple. I don't admit you." But we did not give up our idea. He took us around to show us Suan Mokkh and told a man to find us lodging. However, turning to us he repeated: But I don't admit you here". We did not listen to him. We stayed there for five years.
>
> The simple life of the monks who live at Suan Mokkh and there dedication, Buddhadasa's teaching and his joining in work with other monks, all these strongly affected me. Spiritual development is through working. Work is life, and working is practicing the dhamma. I joined all kinds of work with them, breaking and grinding rocks with a hand-tools, bending iron rods, and constructing buildings, etc.
>
> The love of work is the spirit I acquired from Suan Mokkh. I left Suan Mokkh for several reasons in 1970. My mother was old and I wanted to assist her in her old age. I also wanted to do something for our poor people in the Northeast. If you ask how I came to have the ideal of working for rural development, you can write down that it come from Suan Mokkh.

A second example is Mr. Lamai Suwanasang, 72, who is a farmer in the rural area of

Aao-luak, Krabie province in the southern Thailand.[11] He has completed 3 years of primary school. According to Lamai he was one of the most mischievous children in his family when he was young. He was also known as the tough guy, and earned his living by illegally brewing liquor. He also pointed out that none of the villagers liked him, and that he learned occultism. He was ordained as a monk for one year at age 22. For him, Buddhism was nothing more than doing good deeds and avoiding evil deeds. In 1952 a senior monk at Nakhon Sri Thammarat gave him the Buddhasasana journal issued by the Dhammadana Foundation, Chaiya. The monk told him this was the real dhamma.

(i) Lami's understanding of Buddhadasa's teachings:

> I read several articles with both interest and surprise because they were about dhamma and life which I had never heard of before. The statement "dhamma is duty" was the one which impressed me most. Buddhadasa's teaching made me understand life and dhamma in the widest perspective. They are inseperate. Dhamma is doing duties to achieve good life both materially and spiritually. Working is the practising of dhamma and it is the path to access nibbana. Buddhism is really a way of life. Nibbana exists in life and can be reached in this life. It is also free of charge, and you need no money to make a lot of merit.

(ii) Impact of Buddhadasa's teaching on Lami's life and commitment to spreading dhamma:

> My life had its goal. I gave up all bad earnings, abandoned occultism. I worked intensively because it is the work only which can help us. I was not exhausted, upset or suffering but was pleased and happy to have work and its results. I spent money only when necessary and kept the rest. Within 2-3 years, the economic condition of my family became better. The problems in the family were few. I had 10 children to bring up and educate but the problems never made me weak.
>
> I did not have any conflicts with anybody in my village at all. Whatever problems the villagers had they consulted me, especially they asked me to teach dhamma to their children. I have spread Buddhadasa's teaching to the youth in my village. If they understand dhamma, it is better for the society because once you understand dhamma, everybody will work out his own duty to the best of his ability. I will stop working immediatly whenever someone shows interest in dhamma and wants to talk about dhamma with me because I saw this thing work in myself and I knew it could be in others. The dhamma conversation group in the village now consists of 90 people. Most are young and about 20 persons understand dhamma deeply and help to spread it. My 10 sons all are interested in reading Buddhadasa's books and they were ordained at Suan Mokkh.

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11 Interview with Mr. Lamai Suwanasang at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

(iii) Lami's attitude towards the traditional monks:

> I tried to spread dhamma to the monks in the village. I gave them Buddhadasa's books and tapes. Although the monks in the illage are still teaching dhamma traditionally, I go to the temple to make merit and hear the sermons every sabbath day to set a good example for my descendents and for the sake of community unity which is also dhamma.
>
> Traditional monks are like trees though they are not perfect (they do not study and practice dhamma strictly), we should not hurridly uproot them because they still can give us some shade. We must give them fertilizer; and look after them well. Finally, they will become perfect.
>
> I have spread Buddhadasa's teachings for more than 30 years but he does not know me. When I visit him on his birthday at Suan Mokkh, I pay my respects to him and stay for 5-7 days and when I return, I again pay respects to him. That's all because I have nothing to talk with him. His teachings are all in his books.

A third example is Mr. Thawat Kaisornkittikul, age 40, a Chinese merchant in Bangkok.[12] He narrated that his father was a Chinese businessmen. After he finished secondary school, he began to get involved in gambling. He and his close friend spent day and night in the casino. After his friend decided to become a monk, Thawat felt he had no other choice than to become a monk himself. Thus, in 1972, both he and his friend were ordained. They stayed in the same temple in Bangkok but in different kutis (monk dwelling). His kuti contained nothing but a mat, a pillow, and 10 dhamma books. On the first night he had nothing to do so he read those books. This was the first time that he had ever read a dhamma book.

(i) Thawat's Experience with Buddhadasa's teachings:

> The first book, by Buddhadasa <u>Three Months Ordination</u>, I read which made me understand religion and the purpose of ordination. The most impressive teaching is searching for Buddha in oneself. I continued reading the rest of the books thirstily until dawn. I had never thought there would be such a teaching in religion. The real teaching is so powerful. My ideas and feelings changed, I went out to receive alms in the morning with the feeling that I had a new life.
>
> I asked a neigboring monk about Buddhadasa's book, and he was very pleased that I was interested. He went to get Buddhadasa's books from many kutis for me- 50 more. I intended to do my duty as a new monk. After this rain retreat

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12 Interview with Mr. Thawat Kaisornkittikul at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, 1988.

> (three months), I went to Suan Mokkh. I did all kinds of hard work the monks at Suan Mokkh did with pleasure to return my gratitude to Buddhadasa that his teachings gave me a new quality of life. But I never talked to Buddhadasa. After spending one month in Suan Mokkh, I had to disrobe to help my parents to do business.

(ii) The changes in his lay-life and further spreading dhamma:

> Although I am a lay, I lead my life as a monk does. Of course, I don't forget that men are living their lives on four levels: spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical. I don't refuse material enjoyment but I know it is nothing. I eat one meal, lead a simple life and dress easily. I gave up gambling absolutely, including drinking, smoking. I set my life in order as well as my work and expenses. I worked hard with the feeling that everything is duty, it must be worked out best, no matter what kind of work it is. I am happy with my work. My business improved within one year. I felt that my life and my future lie in my own hands, I am the one who provides my own fate.
>
> By leading life simply, working hard, spending little, economic conditions improved and I became a good example to my friends. I convinced them to turn to dhamma and it really affected ten of my friends's lives. I spread Buddhadasa's teachings for 15 years by giving out Buddhadasa's books to those who were interested, 100-200 books yearly. My wife is now very interested in Buddhadasa's books.

The fourth example is Mrs. Sriya Wattanapahu, age 44, a medical doctor at Saraburi hospital.[13] She recounted that she works with patients who are suffering. She would become very unhappy when one of her patients died. She was prone to believe that her patients died because of her fault more or less. Therefore, she often worked in a state of worry and irritation.

(i) Impact of Buddhadasa's teachings on Sriya's life and work:

> In 1983 a senior doctor in the same hospital gave me a book Dhamma is Duty by Buddhadasa. It was the book which made me understand the truth of life, the meaning of doing duty. The key word that opens me to Buddhadasa's teaching is "working is dhamma practice". Every duty is both a spiritual and a material activity. I began to read more of Buddhadasa books more and more. His teachings create the "ideal of doing duty" in my spirit. Now I love and am proud of my work mostly because it gives me a chance to help suffering people both physically and mentally. I am not bored to talk with patients, giving them

13 Interview with Mrs. Sriya Wattanapahu, Bangkok, 1988.

> confidence, putting their mind at peace, encouraging them to fight the physical disease. I work harder than before without exhaustion and discouragement but become pleased and happy. I am no longer too unhappy when a patient dies because I have done my duty to the best of my ability.

(ii) The attitude towards Buddhadasa's teachings:

> Buddhadasa's teaching is the substantial dhamma, teaching to use wisdom in everyday life, not to be superstiously silly. The teaching could be accepted as being real Buddhist teaching in essence and can apply to all. It gives me hope for the future of our country because of results that are being achieved. Each person has to "set things right" within himself and within his own family before he should presume to attack the problems that concern him on a larger scale. I believe that a way to alleviate or to solve social problems in Thai socity is to spread this teaching as much as possible. I try to spread Buddhadasa's teaching among my colleaques, patients, and the students in the Nursing College of our hospital. I also set up a dhamma group (Etappachayata Club). We hold dhamma coversation groups twice a month at my house. Now there are 200 menbers in our group and 10 are highly interested and active in spreading Buddhadasa's teaching. We have issued a three month bulletin as a communicative medium between the members since 1986. My husband and my daugther are also interested in dhamma.

In short, our interviews show that interest in Buddhadasa's movement is sparked by Buddhadasa's books which are spread through many kinds of personal relationships. Individuals read them for a variety of reasons and are inspired and influenced by other aspects of the teaching. Though they were from different social backgrounds, however, they joined the movement on the basis of teaching understanding. More significant is the emphasis on changing values and attitutes amongst individuals. Finding the meaning of life, the condition of existence has been conceived as subject more to change and development. Behavioral changes and new moral ideals of life are frequently expressed by our respondents. Individuals perceived Buddhadasa's teachings to be of great importance in prompting them to change their lives as well as to improve their social and economic status. They also felt that Buddhadasa's teachings not only held a relevant message for the conduct of their affairs in this-world, but that they encompassed the real meaning of Buddhism. With regard to the monk-followers, Buddhadasa's teaching seems to offer meaning to their role as monks as well as attract them to devalue superstitions. This assessment of the importance of his teachings was not only expressed by the four people in our case interviews, but by most of the

individuals in our sample. His books, moreover, led many people to reconsider and radically alter their lives and values, and fostered an "unshakable devotion" in Buddhism.

Certain attitudes of Buddhadasa's followers toward social problems and problem situations reflects other aspects of the movement. Our interviews suggest that attitudes of Buddhadasa's folowers toward social problems tend to focus on individual rather than social order and institutions. Problems of criminality, unemployment, corruption, and poverty are largely considered in a frame work of personal moral terms and concepts of ethical conduct. These conditions would automatically right themselves following the change of a sufficient number of individuals and influential persons in society at large.

"Greed, Hatred, Delusion" was advanced to explain the existence of the most serious problems. Many believed that the causes of thousand problems and conflicts were rooted in selfishness. Phra Maha Pratheep, a monk-follower at Wat Chonprathan who is active in propagating Buddhadasa's teaching said:[14]

> It is foolish to develop country (nation) when failure is made in developing the men who make them...in solving the problems of individuals the social problems will melt away...Most people have planned something far biger than they know... My hope for our country lies in the spiritual force of mankind. I am convinced that morality is more needed today than ever before.

"If you want to be in a good society the best place to start is with yourself" or "Everybody wants to see the other change, but everybody is waiting for the other to begin" or "There is no place to begin but with individuals" were the phrases I most often heard from my respondents. The solution for social problems they perceived to lie in rapidly expanding Buddhadasa's teachings. They believed that when people understood their own nature (through Buddhadasa's teachings) they would change their lives. With individual change would come solutions of social problems.

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14 Interview with Phra Maha Pratheep at Wat Chonprathan, Nonthaburi, 1988.

Chapter 7

Social Impact of the Buddhadasa Movement: A Case Study

Buddhadasa movement has won increasing attention through the last half century and remains relevant today. Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism has inspired individuals and groups in various social sectors to rediscover the meaning of Buddhism and to search for appropriate means to apply it in their daily lives and activities. Challenges arose after finding the underlying essence in their own culture. Many development organizations and foundations, according to Seri Phongphit, which have arisen since then owe much of their inspiration to Buddhadasa's teachings, for instance Khana-Kammakarn Sasana Pua Karn-Patana (the Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development), Mulaniti Patana Chonnabot (the Thai Rural Reconstruction Foundation), Mulaniti Dek (the Children Foundation). The search for the application of Buddhist teaching to modern life has been actively engaged in by both monks and laity in rural and urban areas. More and more monks devoted themselves to rural development work in the North, the Northeast, the South, and the Central regions. Some are head of provinces, districts, and abbots. They became leaders in their communities as well as inspirers of a new force with a wider circle of influence. Besides monks, laity in different professions including university professors and lecturers, judges, doctors, bussinessmen, teachers, are also playing a vital role in reformulating Buddhist teachings for various segments of lay society. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the social impact of the Buddhadasa movement at the community level.

This case study on community involvement and the Buddhadasa movement is based on field research undertaken at Wang Nam Yad village, Mae Soy sub-district, Chomtong district, Chiang Mai between 1987-1988. This study examines the role of a Buddhist monk, Phra Pongsak Techadhammo, the abbot of Wat Pha-laad, Chiang Mai, who is a follower of Buddhadasa well acquainted with Buddhadasa's ideas. He has been devoting his time to a development project at Wang Nam Yad, an area fraught with problems typical of the rural north: massive deforestation and poverty.

During the period of fieldwork (1987-1988) the author lived in Wang Nam Yad for three months (January-March 1988) and later frequently visited the village in order to join some of the villagers'activities. The small-scale study involved individual and group

interviews, observation, and participation in village events, and efforts to assess the role of Phra Pongsak in rural development and forest preservation both in the village and sub-district. I had no fixed set of questions but attempted in each case to direct inquiry to topics on which the informant had particular knowledge. Occasionally I conducted group interviews with the villagers, and this method proved very useful in stimulating discussion on a number of important issues -in the heat of argument, it would probably not have emerged in an indivual interview. Most of the interviews were conducted in villages with a northern dialect which I am able to speak and understand. Because many important village meetings occurred before my field research was conducted, I also borrowed tapes recorded and video films which recorded meetings with Phra Pongsak. I did not, however, rely solely on the tapes and video films to gather information about these previous meetings. Interviews were also conducted with the persons and groups recorded on the tapes and video films to confirm our impressions and assessment of these meetings. To provide a better understanding of the background of the situation I will give a brief description.

Introduction

The name of Mae Soy is now always connected with the name of a 58 year-old forest monk, Phra Pongsak Techadhammo (Ajarn Pongsak) who has spent 35 years living in the forest and walking on pilgrimages (tudong) all over the north forest of Thailand. He believed that forests, water resources, the survival of farming villages, and morality are inextricately linked. The drastic deforestation at Mae Soy led to the shortage of water in streams which caused hardship for the farmers, who could no longer earn their living, and thus resorted to thievery. He began to work with the villagers to save the remaining forest and repair the damage already done by deforestation. He has not only preached to the people but has also initiated conservation projects. He faced many problems from the beginning. It was very difficult to motivate the villagers because most of them, despite hard labour, remained near or below subsistence level.

But when the villagers began to realize the importance of the forest to their lives, what followed was the growth of one of the strongest forest preservation movements in the

North. Together with the moral backing from the monk, a great many villagers discovered the will to fight against anyone who tried to exploit their forest. His efforts in rounding up villagers to protect the forest against illegal loggers have pitted him against those with vested interests includings the local government officials. Intimidation is the least of his worries, since death threats have occurred. But the unassuming monk continued his programmes despite many risks. He said that: [1]

> I am not afraid to work like this because -well, if you have opened your heart to the suffering of the villagers, you would do just the same. I have seen the problem with such clarity that I have no choice but to follow the course that I am taking.

Ajarn Pongsak is now at the centre of controversy, particularly among certain government officials for his anouncement that "a single forest protection law can not be used to stop the massive destruction of the forest". He feels that although the law punishes, it does not teach people to love the forest as they love their lives. He has became well known among conservationists both in Thailand and abroad for combining Buddhist teaching, conservation, and rural development to solve the problem of deforestation and poverty at the village level. His work is an example of what many people hope to be a long-term solution to poverty in the rural areas. In 1988, he won the Good People of Society award, given by the Thai Rath and the Village Foundation in recognition of his work at Mae Soy. In 1989, he received the Good Supporter of the Royal Forestry Department award, given by the Agriculture Minister who announced that "Buddhist teachings can solve the environmental crisis". He was also a recipient of the Global 500 Roll of Honour award in 1990, given by the United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP).

General Background of the Village Community

Wang Nam Yad (means the village of water's source) is a farming village, located on the alluvial plain of the Mae Ping river, some 75 kms. southwest of Chiang Mai. The village is

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1 Interview with Phra Pongsak at Wat Pha-laad, Chiang Mai, 1988.

composed of two hamlets, situated close together. The population, according to the official register kept by the village headman, was found to consist of 135 households with 620 people in 1988. The village is one of six villages which collectively form the sub-district of Mae Soy (tambol) included in Chomtong district, Chiang Mai. The settlement pattern of Wang Nam Yad is clustered, like that of the other five villages of tambol Mae Soy. The villages are separated from one another by distances of one to three kilometres, and are connected by dirt roads. Surrounding the villages are paddy fields. Each village (muban) is an administrative unit headed by a village headman (phuyaiban) responsible to the sub-district headman (kamnan). Both positions are elective and filled by local villagers. Village and sub-district headmen, who are paid by the government, are the intermediaries between district administration (the district head office is nai amphur) and the villagers.

Fifty percent of the village land is dominated by high mountains which are part of the Intanon mountain chain, the highest mountain range in Thailand. They are also the sources of three streams which provide the water supply for villages on the plain both for consumption and cultivation. Wang Nam Yad is one of a group of five villages which receive their water from the Mae Soy. This river has two feeder streams, namely the Mae Pok and Mae Tim which rise in two adjacent watershed valleys. The Mae Soy flows into the Mae Ping river which in its turn feeds the Chao Phraya, the river that dominates Thailand's central plain, one of the world's most fertile rice-growing areas.

Another twenty percent of village land are paddy fields and thirty percent is occupied by scrubland. Most of the paddy fields lie behind the village towards the north, near the foothill where weirs and earth dykes are used to control the flow of water from the three streams. The irrigation canals and sub-canals supply water to the paddy fields. This irrigation system is a small unit within which plants, soil, water and human labor are combined to produce crops. It is a small-scale traditional irrigation system which was primarily built and operated by villagers themselves, separately from the village headman and the local administration. There is a village irrigation headman and a committee which were elected by the villagers who use its water. In Wang Nam Yad alone there are two separate irrigation systems for eastern and western fields which lie along the two sides of the Mae Soy river.

The villagers at Wang Nam Yad, as elsewhere in the north, practice subsistence agriculture. Ninety percent of them (120 households) are farmers and own small paddy fields. Basic agricultural production centers on three crops: rice, legumes and vegetables. Of these, rice production is by far the most important and most rice grown is glutinous rice. The rice yields of the villagers appear to be for household consumption. And about forty households (33 per cent) produce less rice than family needs. Although their paddy fields receive some irrigation water, it is not possible for every location to grow more than one crop of rice a year. Because the amount of water available in the irrigation system is often insufficient to meet the needs. It is important to note that the function of the village irrigation system is affected by a great variation in rainfall from year to year, supplementing rainfall when it is insufficient. The level of the water in the streams is often too low to be used during the planting season when the water is most needed. In practice, most farmers rely on rain for their crops.

Some vegetables, requiring less water, are grown as a second crop for home consumption, but there is also commercial production of garlic, onions, soy beans, peanuts, cabbages, and corn. Garlic and soy beans are the basic cash crops. Some of them grow fruit trees, for instance longan, and mango, but only for family consumption. Agricultural pursuits in the village also include simple animal husbandary, gathering plants, herbs and wild fruits, and charcoal making. The division of labor within the village is of importance for effective implementation. A general division of labor does exist between the sexes, but is not rigid. The men do the heavy work such as plowing the rice fields, cutting of the timber. The women work in the village: cooking, feeding animals, fetching the water from the well. Both men and women work in the fields: sowing of seedling, transplanting, and harvesting. The boys and girls assist in all kinds of work but leave the heavy work to their parents. Exchanging labor traditionally given to assist other households such as in harvesting, house building is still much practised in the village. These co-operative labor exchange allows the villagers to carry out the hardest work quickly, and at the same time, it reflects a coorporative and social ties in the village.

The economic activities of the villagers were mainly directly toward subsistence farming, making use of simple tools. Simultaneously, modern technology has been introduced and pesticides and chemical fertilizers are employed to ensure good production. For the wealthier households (5 households) plow-machines and water pumps are used for cultivating the fields. Small village "rice mill" using machinery exists in the village. The owner of the machine is a villager, who either keeps the husks and sell them for pig fodder or takes cash if the villagers wish to keep the husks.

Farmers do not necessarily go to the market to sell their produce, because there are a number of middlemen who come to the village to purchase local produce from the farmers and resell it in the large market centers. Such traders are outsiders. The village has no market center but there are two general stores selling goods for daily use in small quantities. The owner of these shops are local villagers who are also farmers. During the agricultural season, they work in the fields and the shops are tended by old people. Because Wang Nam Yad is close to Chomtong district (about 5 kms), villagers go there for virtually all goods and services that cannot be obtained in the village.

Although, the most important occupation of the village as a whole is agriculture, not all villagers are engaged in agriculture. The villagers who have no land of their own (15 households) earn their living most frequently by working as agricultural laborers, while some do carpentry work, make charcoal and saw timber. A few leave the village to seek employment outside to work in construction sites at Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Soan. The family ties, however, remained strong, usually they work in one place for 10 to 15 days and then return to the village. Most of the salary earned are given to their families or parents. As farming is not able to absorb the increase in population due to rise in birth rate, consequently several farmers also take other kinds of employment when there is no more work to do in their own farms. Particularly, when rain is inadequate and rice yield low, a number of villagers, especially young men, leave the village in search of employment. But only some of them find jobs.

Most of villagers are interrelated. The most tightly knit groups appear to be those of

kinsmen. There are several families who have lived for generations in Wang Nam Yad, and intermarriage is common, providing a bond which encompasses almost the entire village. Generational and relative-age distinctions are vital in village behavior, and kinship terms express these distinction. The extended family unit is breaking down to some degree as newly married couples have their own houses even within the village borders. There are also some conflicts among the villagers, especially concerning the management of water supplies to their paddy fields. There is no serious problem if the supply of water is abundant, but if it is poor, the farmers close to the source draw all the water they need. Those whose fields are remote are in trouble. Usually they are cooperative enough but sometimes each wants to use the water for himself and conflicts arise.

The village has no health center and school of its own. There is one health center and three elementary schools among the six villages of Mae Soy sub-district. Thus, two villages share the same school. The pupils at Wang Nam Yad have to go to Mae Soy school (about 1 km. from the village). All the people in the sub-district have to share the same health center which was built in Mae Soy village. Of the mass media, radio has the most significant impact at the village level. In 1988, electric lights had been installed in most houses and with in one year television sets made their appearence, but only prosperous villagers could own one (6 households). Very few newspapers were found in the village households. Movie and love story magazines have appeared in the village as the youth have become addicted to these on their visits to town.

Wang Nam Yad is not an isolated village. It is situated on the Chiang Mai-Hod highway, 75 kms. southwest of Chiang Mai. Communication with the village is easy and convenient. The village is strung out as a lineal settlement along the highway and there are small buses every fifteen to thirty minutes from Chiang Mai to Chomtong and Hod which run through the village. Undoubtedly, the modernizing influence of town centers and from Chiang Mai itself on social attitudes and the general level of knowledge of villagers is high.

Religious Beliefs and Village Life

Wang Nam Yad has a small temple (wat). The temple was built in the 1960s and is maintained by the villagers. The wat compound is bounded by a wall. There are a vihara (chanting hall), sala (general hall), and kutis (monks's dwellings). The temple itself has no bot (convocation hall) of its own, and so the villagers must go to Wat Mae Soy, a neighboring village, for important ceremonies such as ordination or to see visiting officials.

As all the villagers are Buddhists, the temple is the spiritual center of a village life. The ties between the temple and villagers make it a central place for all meetings, formal and informal. In 1988, there were an abbot, two monks and fifteen novice residents at the wat, and most of them are from this village. Wat Wang Nam Yad, like all other wat in Thailand, has a committee (khana-karmmakarn-wat) composed of the abbot and five lay elders who were appointed by the abbot. All of them are ex-monks. Their duties are to organize Buddhist ceremonies, manage the finances of the temple, and to see that the wat is provided with the necessary equipment. Another important person concerning the wat is called Ajarn wat. His role is to invite (aratana) the monks to give precept, sermon or to chant, and to receive food or other gifts presented by laymen.[2] Most of Buddhist rituals which monks attend requires the invitations in Pali language.

The abbot of the temple is a young man who completed dhamma studies grade 1 (nak tham ek). His everyday administrative duties include instructing monks and novices, appointing a monk to give a chant or sermon when one is required, to clear the temple compound and keep it clean. Status differences of the abbot, monks, and novices are not obvious. All often join in the temple work. The abbot himself attends to more administrative duties and religious rituals rather than joining social activities in the village. He has frequent contacts with other abbots and his district head.

The daily routine of monks and novices begins with a collection of chants in the morning (tham watr) at about 5 o'clock, after which they go to receive food in the village. After breakfast, they learn chants and dhamma, and attend to personal matters such as

2 Tambiah, S.J., *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 133.

cleaning the kuti, washing clothes, filling the water pots. After lunch there is a rest period, they then sweep the temple ground, bath and perform evening chants (tham watr, suad mon) at 6 p.m. They then study dhamma or practice chants before going to bed. It should be noted that as the language of chants is Pali, the monks and novices have to spend most of their time practicing. Learning chants is very necessary for the village monks because every village ritual, whether it is a family ceremony, a village festival or a community activity requires the monks' attendance and their chanting.

During Buddhist Lent (between July to October) the monks and novices have additional religious activities. The abbot teaches dhamma to the monks and novices. A sermon is preached to a village congregation every sabbath day (wan phra) and each monk takes his turn. There is a recitation of the Patimokkha (a set of monastic disciplines) by the full assembly of monks in the bot twice a month on uposatha days (at full moon and new moon).

The major role of monks at Wang Nam Yad is religious. The villagers need monks not only to perform religious ceremonies but to receive their gift and food offerings. This is necessary because it stimulates merit accumulation and consequent well-being. In the eyes of the villagers the monks are a symbol of Buddhism (or the heirs of Buddha); a monks' head is shaven; he wears a yellow robe; he observes the monastic disciplines and moral conducts; his way of life is virtuous. Thus he is more meritorious, said the villagers.

The various elements of Buddhist beliefs and practices among the village people are tied together by the concept of "merit" (bun). Merit-making is the central point of villagers' religious praxis. It involves more ritual than individual religious striving. The important acts of merit include feeding the monks and participation in the various merit-making ceremonies throughout the year.

At Wang Nam Yad, regularly providing food to the monks is the most common religious act in which all villagers engage. They have organized their offering of food to the monks by dividing the village into seven residential neighborhood units, each containing 19 to

20 households. People from different units take turns preparing food. Each section has a leader who is usually a woman. When it is her section's turn, she reminds the women in her section. The monks go to receive offerings of food only to a certain section in the morning. But on sabbath days (wan phra) the monks do not go on alms, as both breakfast and lunch are brought to the temple.

Such daily merit-making is a function of women rather than men. The male family heads and young men go to the temple when the major collective rites are held. Most villagers participate only in the important ceremonial occasions, such as entering Lent (khaw phansa), leaving Lent (org phansa), traditional Thai New Year (songkarn), Visaka Bucha and so on. They make merit by giving food, money, and other valued items to the monks; sermons and chants are recited, and religious blessings are given by the monks; people gain merit. The villagers do not comprehend the meaning of the Pali chants, but the sermons preached in the Northern dialect are often understood by the audience. The sermons on these occasions dwell on the advantage and effect of various kinds of merit-making both in this life and the next life. The aim of the villagers' merit-making is not different from what the monks preach: wealth, health, fortune, prestige, good family, intelligence, beauty both in this present life and the next. Moreover, "transfering merit" to one's dead ancestors is conceived and practiced as an act of gratitute to them.

However, during Lent the village people engage in religious practices which are not typical of everyday life. Many men give up drinking, gambing and refrain from killing anything. Some people are vegetarians. Every sabbath day, a number of people go to the temple in the morning not only to provide food to the monks but to receive the five precepts (such as not to lie, not to steal, not to kill) and some elders practice the eight precepts for a day, both of which imply individual moralistic conduct. Long sermons are delivered by monks in the late afternoon (about 3 o'clock).[3] The sermons consist of the stories of the Buddha's life, the episodes of His previous life (phra chao sib chaad), and various folk tales. These stories, particularly the folk tales, center around the relatively simple explanations of merit

3 Out of the Lent, there is no sermon delivered on sabbath day and the villagers do not observe the five or eight precepts.

(bun), sin (baab), kamma, and rebirth.

Philosophical Buddhist doctrines, such as the concept of nibbana or the involved forms of meditation are not introduced. The villagers'understanding of Buddhism is the teaching of kamma (action). They believe that kamma affects their lives. The villagers believe their present existence is the result of accumulated action (kamma), both good and evil, in both former lives and the present one. Similarly actions in this life affect both this existence and the next. Thus his present conduct is directed towards accumulating merit so as to achieve a better life in the present as well as in the future. If sin outbalances merit, a life of poverty and hardship will follow. These beliefs are a part of their everyday life.

It is important to note that Buddhism in the village is, to some extent, permeated with Brahmanical and animistic concepts. There are obviously non-Buddhist elements such as the sprinkling of sacred water in many Buddhist ceremonies performed by monks. Marriage ceremonies in the village have Buddhist, Brahmanical and animistic elements. The villagers continue to believe in the guardian spirit of the family grouping (phi phu yaa); the guardian spirit of the village (suur baan), and the guardian spirit of the temple (suur wat). For example, before marriage the guardian of the family grouping is informed of the planned arrangments. Similarly, a man cannot change his village membership and residence without a ritual statement to suur baan beforehand. No village festival can be held in the wat without first informing suur wat.

Life Experiences of Phra Pongsak Techadhammo

Phra Pongsak Techadhammo was born in 1932 in the village of Tamnop Sub-district, Thatago District, Nakorn Sawan, the northern province of Thailand (about 250 kms to the North of Bangkok). He was the youngest of the two sons of Teim and Sut Suk-aram. His parents were Thais and were farmers as were almost all the villagers. His parents died when he was very young, so he and his brother moved to live with their uncle's family in the same village.

As a boy he was sent to Wat Tamnop school, a temple school of his native village. After finishing Primary school (Grade 4), he worked in the rice paddies of his foster parent's farm. Though his time was spent on the farm he was not only a farmer but also a trader. After the harvest he bought rice from farmers and resold it to rice mills at Nakorn Sawan. Even though he was the youngest trader in the village, farmers, from his own village and those nearby, prefered to sell their rice to him, because, on the subsequent sale of the rice in town, he would then buy salt from the proceeds, to give as gift to those farmers, a rare and very welcome present.

In 1952, at the age twenty, he was ordained at Wat Tamnop, a temple in his village and he stayed there after his ordination. A few months later he went to Nakorn Sawan to study dhamma for Nak Tham 3 (Nak tham tri) at Wat Nakorn Sawan. After passing the exam he went on to Nak Tham 2 (Nak tham tho). While studying the principles of dhamma he found it very strange that there was no meditation practice along with the theoretical study. In 1955, after finishing Nak tham 2 he went to Bangkok in order to join the meditation course which was held at Wat Mahatat for one month. When the course ended he went on tudong (a meditational pilgrimages) through many parts of the northern forests. He spent two years (1955-1956) practicing meditation in the forests of Chiang Mai. He felt his practice was not advanced enough, but could see no further way forward.

In 1957 he returned to Wat Mahatat in order to check the method of meditation practice with his teachers. But there was no more to be learnt. This led him to study Pali at Wat Mahatat in order to understand more about Buddhist teaching and practice.

During the time he stayed at Wat Mahatat (1957-1959) an internal conflict arose concerning his beliefs. The behaviour and life-style of the monks in Bangkok seemed questionable. Some of them appeared only concerned with studying to pass the exams. Others were clearly ambitious for titles and achievement within the Sangha hierarchy. The rewards and appointments are traditionally distributed once a year. The monks whose hopes were fulfilled would then celebrate their successes. Huge celebrations would be organized lasting for the whole day. Five hundred monks were invited for a Chinese meal, catered by

Chinese restaurants.

He felt that if Buddhism had nothing more to offer than what he had already understood and practiced, it was no longer useful for him to remain in the monkhood. He considered disrobing, but while he was still wavering, another monk, a classmate in his Pali study, told him about Suan Mokkh and gave him a book by Buddhadasa. The Principle of Buddhism was a transcript of the first talk which Buddhadasa gave to the the first group of judges who asked for his teaching. Once he read the first pages of the book, he felt his internal conflict disappearing. Ajarn Pongsak described the experience:[4]

> On the fourth page of the book the question was posed, "What is Buddhism?" It was then answered, "Buddhism is the principle of knowledge and its practice in order to rightly understand what is what."

This was a revelation to him, since before that moment he thought that the purpose of meditation practice was to get something or arrive somewhere. He went on to read as many of Buddhadasa's books as he could find and then decided to go to Suan Mokkh.

Experience at Suan Mokkh

Ajarn Pongsak went to Suan Mokkh in 1959. He did not receive a warm welcome from Buddhadasa. He recounted his first experience with Buddhadasa as follows:[5]

> When I arrived at Suan Mokkh, Buddhadasa was upstairs in his old kuti. He sent a novice down to see me with the message "Tell the monk there is nowhere for him to stay". I was immediately downcast. I told the novice I could stay anywhere, even under the trees. The novice took me to Rong Tham (the open house for gathering). That evening Buddhadasa sent the same novice to me again with another massage, "Tell that monk not to come and see me yet". I waited for two days, very worried. On the third morning he sent the same novice to tell me that he was now ready to receive me. So I went to pay my respects to him. But he ignored me and said, "There is no where to stay". I insisted that I could stay even under the trees. He was silent for a moment and then he said: "Round the back of the hill, there is a small hut that is empty now. You can stay in that". So I settled at Suan Mokkh and stayed there until 1964.

4 Interview with Phra Pongsak Techathammo at Wat Pha-laad, Chiang Mai, 1988.

5 Ibid.

At Suan Mokkh the feelings of peace which Ajarn Pongsak had previously experienced in the forest soon returned. He worked like other monks at Suan Mokkh, building new kutis, cutting a part of a hill to have stones for construction and to build a road. Throughout this time he learned a lot from the teachings of Buddhadasa, both based directly on the dhamma and his talks on a wide range of topics including society, politics and various problems considered in the light of dhamma. He said that he learned most from Buddhadasa when a monk did something wrong or against the teaching. The reprimand he received was not an impression of the passing monent. Ajarn Pongsak gave examples that had impressed him deeply:[6]

> A newly ordained monk cut down a large tree to build a kuti. Buddhadasa went for a walk and saw the stump one afternoon. The next day after the meal he demanded of the assembled monks. Who cut down the tree? The monk who was building the kuti owned up. That day Buddhadasa lectured us on how trees had a value for our lives. He talked for an hour and I summed up that trees are an unlimited resource for human beings. It is from trees and other plants that man finds the four basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Trees are also the creator and protector of the natural balance. An awareness of the value of these benefits is part of morality. In short, a sense of gratitude is an essence of Buddhist morality. How can a monk who is not grateful to the trees for the benefits they provide, be successful in practising dhamma?
>
> Shortly afterward another monk peeled the bark off a lot of trees in order to boil it to make a dye for the monks' robes. Buddhadasa saw all the damaged trees. The next day we once more had the opportunity to hear another striking sermon. "Nature is beautiful and pure. How is it that we as monks, fail to see this beauty and purity. Monks who can not see this how can they attain the truth"

From both sermons Ajarn Pongsak grew to understand how much all life depends on trees. They have their own lives that man has to recognize and respect. He felt gratitude for the trees and plants and thought he owed much to them. Ajarn Pongsak came to realise that trees were as the Buddha has stated, His life's companions who share the common experiences of birth, aging, sickness and death. Previously, though he had lived in the forest and knew that it brought peace, its extraordinary value had not occurred to him.

Move to Chiang Mai

6 Ibid.

In 1964 Ajarn Pongsak left Suan Mokkh for many reasons. He wanted to find a place to study and practice dhamma and to spread Buddhadasa's teaching in the north. He found Wat Pha-laad, an abandoned forest temple located on Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai (about 5 kms. from Chiang Mai). Here there was only an old monk who had been living alone for two years. The old monk was very happy to have another monk for company. Ajarn Pongsak chose to stay there and to seek fulfillment for his religious aspirations.

During the first three years he spent most of the time meditating and steadfastly practicing the way of a forest monk according to the dhamma-vinaya. As traditional tudong monks (wandering monks), every year after Buddhist Lent he would set out on his tudong (wandering) all over the north.

About 1971 Ajarn Pongsak began teaching the dhamma and meditation practice to people at Wat Pha-laad. There were individuals, groups of students and university lecturers from Chiang Mai university who came to discuss and practice dhamma with him since they knew that he came from Suan Mokkh. To practice meditation they asked for permission to stay at the temple for a few days, or few months. Thus, huts in the forest and houses (about 10 huts and 3 houses) were built. At the same time, he has been active in conservation. The large forest area of Wat Pha-laad (about 100 acres) was conserved as khet apai-taan (the land of forgiveness), a part of the religious sanctuary. Tradition prohibit any tree-felling or killing of wild animals in the land of forgiveness.

The time between 1972-1976 was the period of the student movement in Thailand. A huge demonstration led by the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) on 14 October 1973 caused the collapse of the dictatorship. The military was, for a time, removed from the center of power. Thailand entered a new era in its national life. Numbers of students became aware of the growing social problems in the Thai countryside and became involved in programms of rural development. Many groups of them came to see Ajarn Pongsak to discuss how to apply dhamma in community development and how to solve the social problems in contemporary Thai society. Seminars concerning Buddhism as an alternative

way for society were held at Wat Pha-laad under the sponsorship of Khum Phrasan-ngan-sasana phur Sang-khom (the Religious Coordinating Group for Society), Sahakorn Nak-suksa Maha-vittayalai Chiang Mai (Chiang Mai University's Student Union), and Ashsama Pacific (the Pacific Interreligious Relationship for Development). Students from many universities came to Wat Pha-laad to join the seminars.

For Ajarn Pongsak, the ability to apply dhamma in social development required not only discussion but also real dhamma practice. Learning one's Buddhism from books is not enough to bring dhamma understanding. This realization led him to look for a place to set up a meditation retreat centre, particularly for the youth from schools and universities. He went to Mae Soy valley (in Mae Soy sub-district) where he had been during his tudong in 1968. He explained his intention to the village headman and his deputy in setting up the medition centre at a site near the Tu-Phu cave (about 8 kms. from Wang Num Yad village, Mae Soy sub-district). This site was known among the villagers as the site of an an abandoned temple for many hundred years. The village leaders agreed to help him. Three simple huts were built and this meditation centre became known by the local people as Tam Tu-Phu (cave of the old monk). He visited Tam Tu-Phu regulary and also helped the villagers built a weir and feeder canal to their paddies fields. He taught the villagers in the surrounding area of the importance of trees and forests for their lives. But no one cared. The trees were valuable, all right, the villagers mocked. The trees meant money.

Though Ajarn Pongsak set up his meditation centre at Mae Soy sub-district in 1975, in fact it took him many years to start his development work. This was due in part to the downfall of the student movement in 1976. Thammasat University, regarded as the "spiritual center" of student activitism was assaulted by police and rightwing fanatics. Hundreds of students were killed. A rightwing regime was installed with military support. Thousands of students, writers, and intellectuals went underground. Many of them sought refuge eventually with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the jungles of the North, Northeast, and South. At Wat Pha-laad, a hundred Border Patrol Policemen came to sweep the grounds of the temple to search for the weapons and students. Wat Pha-laad was regarded by the authorities at that time as a communist base and Ajarn Pongsak as a communist sympathizer.

He was not only under observation by the authorities (Internal Security Operation Command) but also by the conservative anti-communist Sangha of Chiang Mai (led by Chau Khun Srithammanithad, the former abbot of Wat Sanphakoy, Chiang Mai). After thorough and repeated investigations for many years, they pronounced him "clean". He did not continue any activities at Mae Soy until 1983 when the political situation eased.

Deforestation at Mae Soy Sub-district

We know very little of the community's history. The elder villagers recounted that the area surrounding Mae Soy sub-district was settled by villagers (collectively known as Khon-muang) 200 years ago.[7] Before 1950, the plains and mountains were covered by a dense forest. It contained not only a great diversity of trees but plants of all kinds, wild animals, there was an extensive pine forest, and also varieties of teak, chestnut, and hardwood. The villagers lived in the forest to a great extent. It has provided them with water, building materials, food, fuel and medicine. They were not rich but they were content.

By the mid 1950's a commercial timber company was granted concession from the government to cut teak and other large trees in Mae Soy's plain. The company was not selective in their logging. Although there was still an apparent abundance of forest at that time, clear-felling was common practice, and this prevented the regeneration of the forest.

In 1973, after most of the large trees had been cut, a tobacco company was given permission to thin the forest, to take fuel for curing leaf tobacco. It had been stipulated that they were only to take trees less than ten inches in diameter, old defective and poor quality trees, and to replant as many trees as were taken. But illegal loggers moved in at the same time. The villagers thus witnessed the destruction of their greatest asset by what they thought to be powers beyound their control.

After the tobacco company's logging activities the local villagers who lived close by, finished the destruction by cutting virtually all the remaining young trees to be used in making

7 Interview with Mr. Kaew Kantajai, an elder of Wang Nam Yad, 1987.

charcoal. By 1978 the forest was devastated. The former deciduous forest had turn to scrubland. Now there is a burning hot plain of thorny scrub.

In addition, in the mountain area of Mae Soy sub-district there was another important cause of deforestation which is unique to the area. The headwater area was destroyed by the hilltribes, namely Hmong, through the practice of slash-and-burn shifting cultivation. The changing conditions of the upper watershed have led to the drying of the streams which feed the whole agricultural plain of the Mae Soy lowland. The activity of the hill-tribes is a complex issue and needs wider description in order to understand the picture, which is not within the scope of this thesis.

Beginning the Conservation Project at Mae Soy

In February 1983, Ajarn Pongsak went to his meditation retreat centre (Tam Tu-Phu) and found that the forest had been severly destroyed in Mae Soy valley. The forest in the lowlands had been swept away by concessionaires for commercial companies. Illegal logging had been carried out on the mountain ridges. Hilltribes, who migrated and settled on the upper watersheds of the Mae Soy valley practiced slash-and-burn cultivation destroying the forest from the top down. The lowland farmers who had not enough rice to last the year, resorted to making charcoal and cutting down the trees from the bottom up. Deforestation at Mae Soy had reached a crisis.

Ajarn Pongsak did not start by preaching to the villagers or persuading them to practice meditation, but rather he requested to discuss the situation with them. The meeting of village leaders and Ajarn Pongsak was a simple get-together. The concrete problems in daily life of the villagers, the problem of deforestation, and alternative solutions were discussed in detail. The village leaders knew that poverty in the village together with the increase in the population had led to an encroachment on the forest. It was a very complicated problem for them to solve.[8] The villagers were poor. Most of them had only a small piece of paddy land.

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8 Group interview with ten villagers and village headman of Wang Nam Yad, at Ban Wang Nam Yad, April 1987.

Cultivation yielded less than family needs. They had rice for family consumption for only about 5 to 8 months in a year. Whenever the rain was scarce, the villagers suffered even more. Landless families had to sell their labour daily. The villagers lived on cutting and selling wood, making charcoal, and selling their labour.

Ajarn Pongsak recognized that poverty in the villages was serious but insisted that the villagers had to stop cutting trees, making charcoal, and burning the forest during their hunting and gathering in the summer season because it was the only way to save the remaining forest. He saw that massive deforestation had led to the poor rain and water shortages that were affecting all aspects of life in the village. He suggested that the villagers should start taking care of the forest themselves before it was too late. They should not sit and wait for the government or anybody to do it for them. They had to be united and work together. Although the forest of Mae Soy valley is a national forest reserve and belongs to the government, the district forest officials came to inspect the forest only twice a year. How could they save the forest from all the illegal activities of both the villagers and hilltribes? Officers were too few and problems too many.

Ajarn Pongask argued that alone the forest protection laws and the district officials could not save the forest because the law was in the district officer's drawer. When the officials visited the forest, they brought the law with them, and the villagers and hilltribes stopped cutting the trees. And when the officials returned to their office, they brought the law back with them. So the villagers and hilltribes brought out their axes again. This problem of enforcement had been going on for decades.

Now deforestation at Mae Soy had reached a critical point. If the villagers did not protect their forests themselves, there would be no chance of keeping the remaining forest from destruction. Ajarn Pongsak advised that the villagers should ask for permission from the Royal Forestry Department to register the forest area of the Mae Soy valley as a Buddhist Park because it was the only way that the forest could possibly be protected. As a Buddhist Park, the trees and every kind of wild animal would belong to sasana (religion or Buddhism). Traditionally, the villagers would not destroy the sasana property. At least, they would not

cut the trees or shoot the animals within the boundary of the temple. Eventually, the village leaders agreed to his idea.

Subsequently, in May 1983, the first survey group of villagers led by Ajarn Pongsak went up the Mae Soy valley to inspect the watershed area where the sources of three streams provide the water supply for the villages'consumption and cultivation; Mae Pok, Mae Tim, and Mae Soy. They found that only 10 percent of the watershed of the Mae Pok, 40 percent of the Mae Tim, 80 percent of the Mae Soy remained. After the inspection they had another get-together to discuss the exact area which should comprise the the park. Half of the village leaders wanted to establish the park for the whole of the watershed area of the three streams. Some of those present wanted to start with the Mae Soy watercourse because there were still a lot of big trees. Others said all or nothing. They were unable to find a way for everybody to agree.

In 1985 the rain was poor, and the water level in the three streams dropped sharply. The rice yields were low and the vegetable crop was almost completely lost. Most villagers ran short of rice and accumulated more debt. Raiding parties filched vegetables from the Hmong fields. This led to the murder of one villager who had stolen corn. Tension ran high between the lowland farmers and the Hmong who lived on the ridge. In April of 1985 there was a fire in the watershed area which raged for three days and three nights and smouldered for a week after that.

Buddhist Teachings and Conservation

The village leaders came to consult Ajarn Pongsak. The Ajarn saw that extensive destruction of the forest, poverty, and declining moral were interrelated. He decided to hold a meeting with the sub-district council and the Sangha of Mae Soy sub-district.[9] The Ajarn pointed out that deforestation at Mae Soy valley had reached a critical point. Shortage of rain, a part of the result of deforestation, causes hardship to the farmers and had led them to act

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9 All details of this meeting below was recorded with a tape-recorder by a follower of Ajarn Pongsak, 1985. The information came from the transcribing of the series of tapes which is kept at the Dhammanaat Foundation, Wat Pha- laad, Chiang Mai.

selfishly or even commit crimes.

Moreover, the Ajarn saw that Buddhism, the monks, and the temple were all still in the village. Villagers were still going to the temple and making merit in accordance with traditions. But the sense of deep togetherness, an old community spirit, had gone. The villagers lacked the initative to co-operate as a group for the sake of the common good. If they faced any big difficulty or found themselves facing a new challenge, they would find it very hard to work for the good of all. The villagers could not find a solution to their hardships. Whatever the problem they faced, people expected the government or outside organizations to solve it. This attitude of sitting and waiting for outside help was harmful to morality (sila-tham), according to the Ajarn. Most of monks probably did not perceive that the decline of rural communal values affected morality. He therefore considered it his duty as a monk to bring dhamma back to people's lives.

Destruction of the Forest was a Spiritual Problem

Furthermore, Ajarn Pongsak pointed out that the destruction of the forest was a spiritual problem as much as a material one. The attitude of all those involved in forest activities was not only unaccomodating in solving this problem, but it was also an important cause of deforestation. For example, the attitude of the government seemed to be that all forests belonged to the government, and that they were valuable resources only in term of goods and revenue. This led to the legal destruction of the forests through such means as giving timber concessions, said the Ajarn. Furthermore, the government officials saw themselves as protectors of the forest. The local people who cut down the trees or made charcoal were then seen as thieves. Thus, a very undesirable situation had developed between the government officials and the local people. They had come to think of each other as "us" and "them", as arch enemies. The attitude of the local people towards the forest seemed to be to see trees only in terms of money or wood, said the Ajarn. So they cut down the trees and burned the forest thoughtlessly. They also thought that since the government owned the forest, they need not feel a sense of caring for or responsibility to the forest even though the survival of their lives and communities depend on it.

The Law Itself cannot Protect the Forest

Ajarn Pongsak believes that the survival of the forests depends upon changing the attitude of the government, government officials, and all people towards the forest and instituting proper planning between the government officials, monks, and people at all levels. He saw that forest protection laws by themselves could not solve this problem because their hold was too superficial. The law does not educate people to appreciate the value of forests. However, neither could dhamma by itself, because some people are incapable of learning. Thus authority must protect the forest by law. So the officials, monks and people must work together each with different duties, towards the same goal in order to solve this problem, said the Ajarn. He stressed that success in solving a problem means bringing dhamma back to social life, which is a duty of all Buddhists.

When Forest is destroyed, Morality is destroyed

Buddhism, according to Ajarn Pongsak, is a way of life that ensures peace and harmony in society. Monks' duties go far beyond narrow religious activities. From his Buddhist point of view, the approach to solve the problem of deforestation is to educate all agencies and people in the Buddhist concept of sila-tham (morality). The essential part of Buddhist morality (sila-tham), according to Ajarn Pongsak, teaches the knowledge and understanding of the true value and meaning of things to life, and gratitude towards things of such benevolence. To live with a sense of gratitude is the true life of the Buddhist.

Morality (sila-tham), for Ajarn Pongsak, does not simply mean the five, eight, ten, or two-hundred and twenty-seven Buddhist percepts. Performing all the Buddhist precepts (sila, such as not to lie, not to steal, not to kill) in itself does not mean we have sila-tham (morality), said the Ajarn. Sila-tham (morality), in its spiritual meaning, means the maintainance of balance both physical and spiritual within the individual, the society, and the environment. These two forms of balance are inseperable. All Buddhist precepts (sila) are tools to help achieve this balance. The key to successful living lies in finding and maintaining a balance of

physical and spiritual aspects of life, society, and environment.

The balance of nature in the environment is achieved and regulated by the functions of the forest, said the Ajarn. It provides a space for human to live in peace and contentment. Destroying the forest or not recognizing the value of all the benefits we owe to the forest (nature) is a lack of morality (sila-tham). When we destroy the forest, we offend the basic morality (sila-tham), both physical and spiritual. Mankind may take whatever the natural world provides, but man must also exercise responsible action in order to maintain it. "To have a sense of gratitude to nature (forest)", he said "is to gain an understanding of the essence of Buddhist morality".

Forests are the creators and protectors of the balance of nature. They are a basic element of sila-tham. The survival of forests is essential to the survival of sila-tham, and ensures human well-being and harmony in society. It is, therefore, a direct responsibility of monks to teach people to protect the forest and environment, said the Ajarn.

In addition, Ajarn Pongsak pointed out that Buddhism is essentially a conservationist religion. In the Buddha's time the forests were the monks' abode. The monks had to live simply and in harmony with nature -understanding the way of nature is understanding the truth.

Finally, the Ajarn asked for the monks of Mae soy sub-district, the rural monks who appreciate the importance of the forest, to teach and awaken an understanding of the value of the forest in the villagers' lives. Effective preservation of the forest must begin with the people who live within it. The villagers had to feel the forest as theirs, before they would be willing to protect it. The Sangha of Mae Soy sub-district and the Sub-district Council agreed to lead the villagers. They made a written appeal to the district officer to halt the hilltribes further destruction of the upper watershed forest and also informed him that they were to take on the responsibility of protecting the forests of Mae Soy.

During the collection of all villagers' signatures for the appeal, the District Head

Officer (nai amphur) happened to visit a development project in the village. Some of villagers asked the District Head Officer for his opinion on the appeal. The nai amphur said "Where is Ajarn Pongsak? We do not know anything about him. He may just come to cause trouble for you and then disappear, what will you do then? [10] This was enough to make the people tear up the paper with the signatures. The villagers divided into two groups: those who wanted to join the conservation project, and those who were frightened of being arrested for doing so.

The Role of Monk in Forest Preservation

Two weeks later (October 1985), Ajarn Pongsak called a meeting of all the villagers of Mae Soy sub-district. Things really started in earnest. Five hundred people, the Sub-district Council, and the abbot of all five monasteries met at Wat Mae Soy. The Ajarn talked about the importance of the forest.[11]

> We, villagers look at a tree and see only its value in terms of money or how much we can sell it for. Therefore, we fell and burn the forest thoughtlessly. We think that forests belong to the government. So we feel we do not have to protect the forest even though it feeds and shelters us from birth to death.
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> The forest does not simply mean valuable resources, goods or money. It has its own life, and is useful to all mankind. The forest stands for the world's life and land. It is the source of food for the world, feeding man and animals since the beginning of time. The value of the forest is inestimatable.
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> Forests and its benefit are a boundless source of wealth, not just money and wood. They are the foundation for maintaining the natural cycles of the air we breathe; they help to regulate the rainfall upon which our lives depend; they form a giant "sponge" with their extensive roots in the soil from which the rivers emerge; they produce clean water for us to drink; they enrich soil which we grow our crops in. Every tree and its leaves are useful to the world. They give freely of their produces and ask for nothing in return. They are common property belonging to the whole nation. Cutting trees or making charcoal is no compensation for the death of the forest which used to sustain us. Let us not forget how much we are owing to the forest, and to regard it with reverence and gratitude.

The Ajarn, moreover, preached gratitude to the forest as the villagers' first home and

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10 Group interview with ten villagers and village headman of Wang Nam Yad, at Ban Wang Nam Yad, April 1987.

11 The information was derived from tape-recordings concerning the Ajarn's sermon given to villagers which was recorded by the Ajarn's follower, October 1985.

second parents.[12]

> For us (rural people), forest are our first home. The one we live in, that we cherish so dearly and are possessive about is in fact only our second home. Without the first, we cannot have the second. Why do we destroy and burn our first home?
>
> Forests are also our second parents. Our human parents give us life but the forest sustains it. We never brought food because we found it in the forest. Forests are like parents serving all the children. From it we get the four necessities of life -food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. We recognize gratitude to one's parents as a great virtue, so how can we live off the forest so thanklessly? How can we kill our second parents, so mindlessly? A mind that feels no gratitude to the forest is a coarse mind.
>
> The failure to see and appreciate the value of the forest for its unlimited benefit to life, to seek out to destroy it, is spiritual corruption.

The Ajarn also indicated that the forest, in fact, belongs to all villagers because it feeds them from generation to generation. Their well-being is one with the well-being of the forest. The impetus for the regulation and protection of the forest lies in their own hands rather than the government officials. By starting small, they can effect changes in their small ways. Then the authorities would later follow. If the villagers did not begin to co-operate in order to take on the responsibility to protect their remaining forest themselves, the situation would just be hopeless for them. To emphasize this point he indicated that there would be more hardship and asked what the future would hold for their children. How would the villagers feel if their children become robbers or beggars, he asked pointedly. Thus, he concluded that if the villagers started to protect the forest they would not only be protecting their lives but that of their children and grandchildren.

After this preaching, the divided villagers united, the appeal was rewritten. This time it was signed by all the villagers, the monks, and the Sub-district Council, and sent it to the District Officer. Subsequently, the District Head Officer replied that action would be taken to prevent further destruction of the forest watersheds and asked the villagers to cease their agitations on this matter. At the same time the Sangha's head of Mae Soy sub-district, in an interview with the district head officer, was told there was no need for him and other monks

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12 Ibid., The information came from tape-recorder about "the Ajarn's sermon given to villagers", October 1985.

to join the conservation project of Ajarn Pongsak, "Let him come alone".[13] The deputy district officer responded by requesting the abbots of all five monastries to withdraw from the project. One of the abbots recounted that the deputy district officer declared that:[14]

> "Forest protection was the duty of government officials not that of monks or villagers. If the monks continued to support the project, they will be placing themselves in an illegal situation. They were liable to being disrobed or arrested".

The Sangha head of Chiang Mai received complaints that Ajarn Pongsak was getting involved in activities that were unbecoming for a monk. The sub-district and village headmen were also reminded that they themselves were government officials and therefore subject only to order directly from the district officials. The headmen hesitated to participate in further conservation actions.

Search for the Solution

In order to continue the preservation project, Ajarn Pongsak asked each village to choose ten representatives to meet together and made a second inspection of the upper watershed forests. Instead of the fifty that he requested, ninety two joined this survey. The Deputy District Officer, the District Forestry Officer, and two police went to observe their activities. The sight shocked them. Only a tenth of the once dense forest remained. The rest had been cleared for the hilltribes' cabbage plantations. A number of pesticide bottles were found in the cabbage fields. Several opium fields were also found. A new road had been cut by the Thai Norwegian Highland Development Project right through the ridges of the primary forest. Some villagers took photos all of this.

Resentment of the hilltribes became widespread amongst the villagers. They requested that the police arrest the Hmong for destroying the forest of the upper watershed. The Deputy District Officer, however, reasoned that the Hmong of Ban Pa-Kluay were the responsibility of the Thai Norwegian Highland Development Project which sought to

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13 Interview with the Sangha's head of Mae Soy Sub-district, at Wat Nong Kan, April 1987.

14 Interview with the abbot of Wat Wang Nam Yad, April 1987.

eradicate opium-growing by the Hmong. They thought that once the project had achieved its goals, destruction of the forest would cease. The villagers countered, why is it that when we, local villagers fell a tree, we are immediately arrested but when the hilltribes fell a whole valley and take as much of the agricultural land in the National Reserve Forest as they want, no charge is made against them? Are they above the law. The deputy officer was unable to answer. Instead he asked the villagers in order to probe them, "shall we join the Communist Party?" The villagers refused his suggestion and went on to state their needs -the King as their leader, the police to enforce law and order, and no administration officials.[15]

Three days later (January 29, 1986), the district head officer ordered an investigation into the activities of Ajarn Pongsak. That is, both of his meditation center and his involvement in forest conservation. This news spread through the villages. Resentment grew amongst the people against the district officials. The villagers felt that the officials were protecting the hilltribes. The Hmong were seen as destroyers of the forest and as the cause of their diminished water supply. Discussion on the problem of deforestation at Mae Soy valley became a popular topic amongst the villagers. Many groups of people from villages of the Mae Soy sub-district and nearby went to visit and consult the Ajarn at his meditation centre (Tam Tu-Phu). He preached a number of times on the need for forest conservation and a "correct attitude" towards the forest. He used the concepts of compassion and gratitude, important virtues in Buddhism, to foster the villagers' awareness of conservation.

Further, the Ajarn's actions rather than Buddhist precepts showed how the villagers must behave if they wanted to protect their forest. Small discussions were held between the villagers and the Ajarn. The central discussion focused on how to solve the problem of deforestation and the poverty at Mae Soy.[16] Many alternative solutions were raised and talked about in detail. Tam Tu-Phu, at that time, became the centre of free discussion for the villagers. Through this, the Ajarn taught dhamma to them. The abstract values of Buddhist teachings were translated into concrete acts and linked to the motives of individual actors. He

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15 This information came from group interview with villagers at Wang Nam Yad, April 1987.

16 The information was derived from group interview with ten villagers and village headman of Wang Nam Yad, at Ban Wang Nam Yad, April 1987.

said that "once the villagers are aware their well-being is one with the well-being of the forest and feel gratitude to it, no one needs to tell them about conservation. They will protect the forest themselves because they protect their lives."[17]

The villagers put together a photo story on the deforestation of Mae Soy and sent it to the district office and the Governor of Chiang Mai. An exhibition of photographs showing the state of the damaged upper watershed forest was shown at temple festivals in the villages. As a result, people became more aware of the problem. Many people from other sub-districts who had suffered from severe destruction of their upper watershed forest by the Hmong of Ban Pa-Kluay, eagerly joined the conservation group, until it consisted of over 2,000 people.

In the following month (February 17, 1986), a meeting of 500 villagers was held at Wat Mae soy in order to discuss measures to protect their forest. They also invited the monks of Mae Soy to join the meeting and to lend them moral support for the conservation project. The monks wanted to join, according to the Sangha head of Mae Soy sub-district, but a senior monk of Chiang Mai had given them orders not to do so.[18] The villagers felt that the government officials had not only taken no action towards preventing further destruction of the forest by the Hmong but also attempted to divide and isolate them. It was up to them, therefore, to unite and decide on preventive measures. Two suggestions were made. One that the Hmong be resettled in the valley; the second that a fence be built to protect the headwater of the three streams. The second plan was chosen because the villagers could effect it by themselves. They also notified the district office that they would do this on February, 25, 1986.

The district head officer countered immediately by calling a meeting of the villagers on February 22, inviting the Sangha provincial, district, and sub-district heads, the district forestry head officer, and twenty policemen to attend. One thousand villagers gathered to hear the government officials, including the Sangha heads, forbidding the building of the

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17 Interview with Ajarn Pongsak at Tam Tu-Phu, April 1987.

18 Interview with Suvit Namthep, one of nine villagers who went to ask the monks of Mae Soy sub-district to join the conservation project, April 1987.

fence. The district head officer announced that any activity in the National Reserve Forest was forbidden and therefore the erection of a fence on the forest ridges would be acting against the law. The Sangha heads continued by asking the villagers to heed the district officials' injunction. The villagers countered by describing their problems. One of village representatives said that:[19]

> We, villagers have ceased felling trees, and making charcoal, even though our lives are more diffcult. Why are the Hmong allowed to continue to fell our forest? And why are they are being encouraged to settle permanently in the area of the headwaters?
>
> Why aren't they subject to the same law? The entire upper catchment area of the three streams is directed to the Hmong's cabbage fields. So the streams that used to feed our rice fields are running dry most of the year. This year, three months into the rainy season, 40 per cent of our paddy fields remain unplanted. We are suffering from severe rice shortage.
>
> Worse of all the heavy use of chemical pesticides from the Hmong's cabbage plantations has contaminated the stream water. The Hmong stored pesticides in ponds and pumped them through sprinker systems. During the raining season: dead fish are seen floating on the surface; our buffaloes get sores if they swim in the creeks; we get diarrhoea and dizziness if we drink the water. And when we attempt to protect our remaining forest, we are told it is against the law. How can we save our lives?

The headman of the village irrigation system added that:[20]

> A few years ago, my work was to mobilise villagers to repair the weirs because of strong currents. The water level was enough to cover an elephant's back. Now the streams are fast drying up and we have to dig the stream bed. Little forest is little water also. In all my life, I have never experienced this much hardship. Things are turning upside down.

Another villager continued that:[21]

> Cabbages are a problematic crop. They are worse than opium-growing. For poppies the Hmong need a small amount of land, only three rai per family (1.2 acres) is enough, and it can only be grown once a year. They do not also require

19 The events of this meetting were recorded in video-tape by a follower of Ajarn Pongsak, February 1986. The information below was transcribed from the video by the author.

20 Ibid., From the transcribing of video "A meeting between the villagers and Nai Amphor (District Head Offcer)", February 1986.

21 Ibid.

> the use of pesticides.
>
> The problems began when foreign agencies and government authorities set up projects to replace opium cultivation with cash crops such as cabbage. For cabbages the Hmong need to clear a lot of land, up to 20 to 30 rais (8 to 12 acres) per family. As the price is guaranteed, cabbages are planted over more than 10,000 rai (4000 acres) from mountain top to mountain top, where dense forests once stood. Extensive pesticide is used in the cabbage fields. The hilltribes refuse to eat their own produce, preferring to export their vegetables to the town.
>
> As the cabbage can be cultivated three times a year, the steep land lose its nourishment very rapidly, and within a couple of years the patches have to be moved to a new area which means more forest has to be destroyed.
>
> Cabbages earn the Hmong about 7,000 baht a rai (2.5 rai equal 1 acre) at each harvest. The Hmong of Ban Pa-Kluay own 30 to 40 new pick-up trucks, to transport the cabbages down to the district market. They are not hilltribes but traders. And if you think that the Hmong are really abandoning opium growing for cabbages you are fooling yourselves. You do not have to walk deep into the forest to find out that they are behind the cabbage fields. Recently, the Patrol Border Policemen found two heroin refineries in the forest area of Ban Pa-Klauy. By moving the hilltribes down, the growing of opium would automatically end because opium only grows at high altitudes. The question is, does the government want it to end.

Resentment was evident in their voices as they talked about the painful changes and the authorities' lack of responsibility. At this stage the meeting became rather chaotic, various subjects being discussed at the same time among the villagers.[22] What they felt was that the authorities were not attempting to solve the problems.

Agreement with officials could not be reached and the villagers announced their intention to erect the fence around the watershed. A large group of villagers walked out of the meeting. The district head officer asked them loudly, "Are you proposing to treat the hilltribes as though they are cattle, to be kept out of the forest with barbed wire?" One villager replied sarcastically, "No, not cattle. The hilltribes are thewada (Gods); they are above the law of the land". Another villager called out "Here we have a peculiar situation. Officials with both the duty and authority of the law refuse to employ the law with the hilltribes." Tempers were running high. The meeting was immediately ended.[23]

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

It is important to note that prior to the introduction of the conservation project Mae Soy's villagers had never engaged in any serious discussion with government officials in any meetings nor organized protests against the officials because many of them thought that it was against the law.[24]

The Monk-Led Campaign for Conservation

On February 25, five hundred people led by Ajarn Pongsak walked 11 kms. up to the 1500 metres-high ridges, carrying their own food and tools. They erected a barbed-wire fence, ten kilometres long, to mark the upper boundary along the ridge above the headwaters of the three streams (Mae Soy, Mae Tim, and Mae Pok) to protect young trees and the remaining upper watershed forest, covering 70 square kilometres. The fence had gates to allow the Hmong access to crop production but to discourage subsequent cultivation and further destruction of the forest. They also labelled all large trees in the area with official-looking numbers. They worked day and night and finished everthing within 4 days.

The monk's leadership of the conservation campaigns was disapproved of not only by the government officials but also by the clergy. The Ajarn and villagers were immediately charged with encroaching on the National Reserve Forest and stirring up conflict between the villagers and hilltribes. The investigation committee composed of the Sangha deputy of the province, the Sangha district and sub-district head, the regional, provincial, and district forestry head officer, the district head officer, and the policemen came to interview the Ajarn at Tam Tu-Phu.[25] They originally intended to arrest him.[26] The meditation centre was cleared by the policemen. The Sangha deputy of Chiang Mai ordered the Ajarn to leave his meditation centre, as it was illegal to live in the Reserve Forest, and stopped all his conservation work at Mae Soy valley because it was against the law and was also inappropriate for a monk.[27] The district head officer added that the meditation retreat centre

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24 Interview with the headman of Wang Nam Yad, Mr. Saokaew Kantajai, 1987.

25 This information came from the memory notebook of Ajarn Pongsak in "sequent of events" from 1983-1989.

26 So Ajarn Pongsak expressed himself, interview April 1987.

27 Interview with Ajarn Pongsak, at Tam Tu-Phu, April 1987. This story below was recounted by

was illegally set up in the Reserve Forest, and it must be dismantled. The Ajarn explained that the area of the meditation centre was the site of an old monastery prior to the National Reserve Forest, the ruins of which were still evident. He had not damaged the forest in any way. On the contrary, he had urged the villagers to cease destruction of the forest and to protect it. His conservation work was inseparable from Buddhist teachings. To teach the villagers the importance of the forest to their lives and to awaken their responsibilities towards it, was a part of dhamma teaching. In doing this, he was fostering sila-tham (morality) into people's lives.[28]

He opined that nowadays, it was no longer enough to teach dhamma within the temple or to reaffirm dhamma in people by preaching only. The times were dark and sila-tham (morality) asleep, said the Ajarn, so it was now the duty of monks to act concretely in order to bring dhamma back to people's lives. Only by this way could society be saved. Everyone had two levels of duty: duty as a member of society; and as a human being.[29]

As for the villagers encroaching on the Reserve Forest by erecting the fence, Ajarn Pongsak argued that in this case if we followed the letter of the forest protection law, then all the people involved have been at fault.[30] The hilltribes of Ban Pa-Klauy were accused primarily of the destroying the forest because they settled in the Reserve Forest. All the officials in the units of the province, from the governor down to the district officer were the second group said to be guilty. Pointing to the law that states that no human settlements are allowed in first-grade upper watershed forests, he argued that officials had both the duty and authority to act, refused to enforce the law. They had allowed the hilltribes to settle in such an area which is directly against the law. The Thai-Norwegian Highland Development Project was the third guity party. It was faulted for encouraging the hilltribes to settle permanently on the upper watershed area in the National Reserve Forest. The project also built roads through the intact forest on the ridges. This, he stressed, amounted to the destruction of the National

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Ajarn Pongsak and was recorded with tape-recorder by the author.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

Reserve Forest.

Fourth, he and the villagers of Mae Soy were said to be guilty, for erecting the fence in the Reserve Forest in order to keep the last patch of the watershed forest from the destruction of the Hmong. As you can see, said the Ajarn, we have all broken the law. Are there enough rooms in jail for all of us?

In the following month (March, 1986), the villagers formed a Watershed and Forest Conservation Group of Mae Soy Sub-District (Khum Anurak Pha Lae Thon-nam Lam-taan Tambon Mae Soy), in order to manage and control their forest. The group known as the Conservation Group, was headed by Suvit Namthep, 50, a villager of Mae Soy sub-district, who had been recently elected as a member of the Chiang Mai Provincial Council. Most of Mae Soy's people were members of the Conservation Group. There were about 500 hundred adult males who volunteered for the conservation project.

Environmental Consciousness Mae Soy's Villagers

Many conservation activities were operated through the voluntary labour of the members. Fire breaks were cleared over 70 sq.kms., and village fire patrol groups were formed. Regular patrols continued to clear firebreaks, keep the fence in repair and flush out intruders. Water pipes, nine kilometres long, were laid on both sides of the valley to aid in fire control and watering of the forest during dry seasons. Their most important task was to restore the damaged watershed. "The kind of forest that can give birth to rivers, is such a complex system that once destroyed, there is little hope of restoring it to any like its former", said Ajarn Pongsak.[31]

"Little hope, but some is enough for the people of Mae Soy to try", said Suvit "There is no scientific work to provide any model for reafforestation but the locals know a great deal about plants that made up the vanished forests".[32] The villagers collected as many varieties of seeds as possible from the forest, and germinated them in the nursery. The denuded ridges

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31 Participant observation with a group of villagers took part in the tree planting work in January 1987. The author interview with Ajarn Pongsak and many villagers in this day.

32 Interview with Mr. Suvit Namthep in the tree planting work, January 1987.

were replanted with thousands of the original trees. Two thousands holes (1 metre x 1 metre x 1 metre) were dug in heavily degraded areas and filled with rich loam and manure to plant the trees. "It is difficult to assess how much worse it is", complained Mah Muangjai, a headman of the village irrigation system, "Only ten percent of the upper watershed forests remain. We must do two things to ensure we can live in the future: plant trees, and use water as skillfully as we can. This is the only way to solve the problem".[33] "Now we have a clear vision of what needs to be done and how to achieve it, said Min Kantajai, a committee member of the Conservation Group, "Ajarn's teaching is simple and direct. For villagers, it brings promise. But for those who have been making fortunes out of destroying forest, it is a threat".[34] Mrs. Bunpan Charlaonlak, one of the villagers who participated in the tree planting work said "I am a grocer and have no farmland but this is the second year I join this work. I noticed that Mae Soy's people are much more aware of forest conservation and they consider deforestation as a serious problem".[35]

In March 1987, villagers from three other sub-districts of Chomthong, who, too, were suffering from water shortage owing to the destruction of the upper watershed forest by the Hmong of Ban Pa-klauy, joined the Conservation Group, raising the number to over 7,000 people. Subsequently, a meeting of four Sub-districts Councils was held to discuss the deforestation of the watershed forest and the threat to their livelihood. It was agreed that the only way to protect the remaining forest and restore the depleted watershed areas of the four sub-district (Mae Soy, Doi Keaw, Sob-Tia, and Ban Luang) was to move the Hmong village from its present site on the watershed to the valley. Available land on the other side of the Mae Ping River could be given to them.

In April 1986, members of the Sub-district Councils and the Head of the Conservation Group went to talk with the headman and the hilltribes of Ban Pa-Klauy, and asked them to move down to the valley where land and water would be prepared for them. However, the hilltribes were unwilling to change their ways. They could not live down below

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33 Interview with Mr. Mah Muangjai in the tree planting work, January 1987.

34 Interview with Mr. Min Kantajai, in the tree planting work at Mae Soy, 1987.

35 Mrs. Bunpan Charlaonlak, interview January 1987.

because it was too hot. The headman, Tong Sae-Yaang said that his people have a good life here, and it is the future for their children.[36]

At the end of May, the Conservation Group submitted a petition to the district and provincial head officers, asking them to relocate the hilltribes to the valley. Shortly afterward the governor of Chieng Mai invited Ajarn Pongsak, the Head of Conservation Group, the Sub-district Council committee, the Thai-Norwegian Highland Development Project officials, the Hilltribe Welfare Division officials, representatives from every government department of Chiang Mai, and the Sangha head of Chiang Mai to attend a meeting at the Provincial Hall.[37] The governor announced that it was not possible to relocate the Hmong in the valley. Hilltribe resettlement required large amounts of money and the government had little money. The Thai-Norwegian Highland Development Project was concerned with the prevention of opium-growing, not with environmental degradation and the conservation of watersheds. Moreover, good land was hard to find and relocation also meant a painful change in the hilltribes' way of life. The Hmong had been living there for so long that they should not be disturbed. But action would be taken to ensure that no further tree-felling should take place within the fence boundary.[38]

The villagers were dissatisfied with the governor's announcement, and the head of the Conservation Group stated that:[39]

> Please try and understand our difficulties. Deforestation at Mae Soy and three other sub-districts is a far worse threat to our lives than angry hilltribes. We fight to protect the last patch of dense forest which is the source of our livelihood. We know that it is hard for the government officials to understand how much our lives depend upon water and forest.
>
> The Hmong first came to settle at Ban Pa-Kluay only 15 years ago, starting with 5 families (about 30 people) in 1975. Their village was located on the head of watershed area. They practiced slash-and-burn shifting cultivation. As their fields have spread, the upper watershed forest has disappeared. We informed the district officer of the problem, initially in 1978 and for several years following.

36 Participant observation in the meeting between the members of the Sub-district Councils and the headman of Hmong at Ban Pa-Klauy, 1987.

37 Information of this meeting came from my transcribing of tapes recorded by Ajarn Pongsak, May 1987. It was kept at the Dhammanaat Foundation, Wat Pha-laad, Chiang Mai.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

> There was no response.
>
> Ten years later (1985), the hilltribes had increased to 101 families, approximately 430 people. Ninety percent of the upper watershed forest of four sub-districts were devastated. Six main streams were running dry most of the year.
>
> Imagine how much 42,000 lowland farmers who depend greatly on water from the hill, suffer. Now other sub-districts have finished planting rice; some are almost harvesting. But we have to wait for the little trickles of water coming down the hill. We are suffering from serious rice shortage and poor crop yields. Moreover, the heavy use of pesticides by the hilltribes for their cabbage fields has contaminated water source, endangering both animals and people's lives. This problem has been raging on for several years without solution.

One of the Conservation Group committee members added that:[40]

> The governor tells us the government has little money, to resettle all the hilltribes down. But, however, much you have, you must use it to bring them down. If only enough to bring down 100 families, then bring just 100, because in a few years there will be 120 or 130. It is better to let them increase in the valley. Since the increase of the hilltribes means that much increase in destruction of the forest.
>
> Problem must be solved at its cause. You cannot leave the wound to fester. If the government does not have enough money to relocate just this one hilltribe village, will they be able to solve the problem of the death of Mae Soy's people?

The head of the Sub-district Council opined that:[41]

> To resettle the hilltribes down in the valley, of course, there is going to be hardship, difficulties in adjusting. But we are not bringing them down and abandoning them. They are coming down to places that have been all-prepared for them with land and water to grow things on. Perhaps the elders will never learn to adjust, but the young people will learn how to grow rice in the valley and learn all about valley living
>
> By moving the hilltribes down, opium-growing would automatically end because opium only grows at high altitudes Moreover, it is not against the law to move people who are living on the watershed which is national property belonging to the whole nation, to settle in a more suitable location.

A representative of the Sub-district Council added that:[42]

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40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

> The issue that if the Hmong move down to the valley, they will lose their culture is irrelevant. In fact, the Hmong have already changed their old way of life. Both government and foreign projects that support the Hmong brought roads schools, clinics, consummer durables, fertilizers, pesticides, and new-found wealth to them.
>
> At Ban Pa-Klauy, television antennae adorn almost every roof of the Hmong; they have their own power generation system. Thirty percent of Hmong families own the new model pick-up trucks. Through cabbage trade, the Hmong have regular contact with the town. Some Hmong families already bought orchards from the lowlanders. Do not judge cultures merely from costumes or language.

The governor, however still insisted that resettling the hilltribes would be a complicated and sensitive matter. It must be a national policy. He declared that the hilltribes should remain on the mountain.[43]

The villagers did not agree with the result of the meeting. They, including the Ajarn, believed that they must push on if they wanted to save what was left of their forest. Mae Soy's farmers said that "We will fight to end the deforestation before it's the end of us, we see very clearly that destruction of the forest means destruction of our lives, so with or without government officials co-operation we will solve this problem".[44] In July 1987, the committee of the Conservation Group staged an appeal, accompanied by photographs of the destruction of the catchment area, heavy use of pesticides on the hill slopes, and the dried streams. The appeal ever directed to the Prime Minister, the Royal Forestry Department, and the Third Army.

The monk and the villagers' campaign to preserve the upper catchment area and call for the resettlement of the hilltribes from the watershed area to the lowland had made the Ajarn a controversial figure, prompting the inevitable question of whether what he was doing was compatible with his role of monk. The critics, said he was involved in actions that amounted to discrimination against a minority group. In reply to why he was making a strong stand on the matter, Ajarn Pongsak said that:[45]

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43 Ibid.

44 Group interview with villagers at Wat Wang Nam Yad, May 1987.

45 Interview with Ajarn Pongsak at Wat Pha-laad, Chiang Mai, 1988.

> I heard this question many times, particularly, from the humanitarians and some government officials concerned. They told me, we must have compassion to the hilltribes because we are Thais and and Buddhists. The hilltribes are Thai too.
>
> I told them that to solve a problem you need wisdom coupled with compassion, whether you be officer, peasant, or monk. If you employ only compassion you would fail. Compassion is not appropriate for every case because it is too soft. If you go to solve a problem, you meet the trouble-maker and feel too sorry for him to do anything to stop him. And what about compassion for his victim? The cure must match the sickness. Compassion must be guided by the clarity of wisdom, and wisdom must be tempered by compassion, otherwise it can be harsh.
>
> The government use compassion and understanding the hilltribes so much until now all the upper watershed forest in the North have gone. But in fact, no one should live and farm on the upper watershed area where the rivers born. That is the heart, the lifeblood of the land. It is common property belonging to the whole nation. We tend to forget that once nature is destroyed, no amount of money will do any good. I feel sorry for the hilltribes, but if the forests are further destroyed all parties, including the hilltribes will be affected.

When I asked whether leading a struggle to preserve the forest has brought out conflict between the Hmong and the lowland farmers, the Ajarn replied that:[46]

> It should not be a conflict, the villagers were willing to find the hilltribes a suitable site and undertake all the necessary work to solve this problem. While the government officials did not think this should be attempted. Conflicts came about just because the government officials lack initiative and understanding of the problem ...they did not accept that the law has failed to preserve the forest and refuse this aspect of monk's duty, that is has place alongside the law....If the government want to preserve forests, their attitude toward forests and the potential of local residents must be changed first.

Community Development from the Grassroots

Ajarn Pongsak continued his conservation work by setting up a community development project to help the villagers become self-sufficient. It was clear to him that the forests could not be effectively protected as long as people were still greatly dependent on them. The Dhammanaat Foundation was set up at Wat Pha-laad, Chiang Mai, in 1987, to carry out the necessary rural development project. With public donations a rice bank, funds for crop produce and for a co-operative shop were established in five villages to relieve immediate needs. Traditional irrigation system and feeder canals were developed to bring all

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46 Ibid.

farmland into cultivation in summer. To enable them to be self-sufficient, some 1500 rai (600 acres) of unproductive scrubland at Wang Nam Yad was surveyed for allotment to 408 landless families of Mae Soy sub-district. Sites for reservoirs and feeder canals were also planned. These activities were co-operative works between the Ajarn and Mae Soy's people.

When I asked the Ajarn whether he had made any plans for the conservation and community development project at Mae Soy, he said that "I have no faintest idea or plan of how to do it. But when I saw the suffering in the village due to forestation. I knew exactly what I had to do..."[47]

The role the villagers played in the campaign allowed them to realize their collective problem-solving capabilities and the potential to improve their own lives. Having awakened to their capacity for self-reliance led to change in various aspects of the community's life, particularly in their role of co-operative arrangements in the socio-economic and political spheres.

Government Actions

In August 1987, things changed. The Director General of the Royal Forestry Department came to Mae Soy, spoke to 5,000 villagers on behalf of the government and assured them it was government policy to relocate the hilltribes to the valley. As a result, the Royal Forestry Department released the area of heavily degraded forest, 1500 rai (600 acres) at Wang Nam Yad to 408 landless families of Mae Soy sub-district. Early in 1988, the Forestry Department, the Dhammanaat foundation, and the Conservation Group started to co-operate on a community development and reafforestation project to help the landless people to become self-reliant. The project aimed to ultimately stop forest encroachment by the villagers. It was agreed that: the Royal Forestry Department would provide machinery and operators, the Conservation Group would provide the labour, and the Dhammanaat Foundation would fund the operation. The five year project will be completed by 1993.

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47 Ibid.

Nine kilometres of dirt road and bridges were built to gain access to the area. Four reservoirs with a capacity of one million cubic metres, four main channels over a distance of seven kilometres with irrigation network were constructed. Levelling 1500 rai of land meant each family could own 3.5 rai (1.4 acres). It was expected that in 1992 all 408 families would be settled. The Dhammanaat Foundation provided three millions baht (150,000 US$) for these activities. All funds of the Foundation come from public and private donations, and in particular, from many intellectual and professional groups from Bangkok that have come to a retreat at the meditation centre. These latter group have included, Thammastan (Dhamma Association of Chulalongkorn University), Ramatibodhi Hospital, United Nations Environmental Programme, Ford Foundation, and the German Embassy.

The strength of Mae Soy's villagers and monk in conducting an effective environment campaign has become well-known in many regions of Thailand. Ajarn Pongsak has been consulted by different groups involved in environmentally related local peoples' campaigns, including groups attempting to organize local communities to protest against the destruction of the forest by "influential people" in the north and northeast, the award of mining concessions, and dam building in intact forests in the south. By helping people to protect the forest, he has come to realize that conservation work can be life threatening, the protection of the sacred robe notwithstanding. Although Ajarn Pongsak has been investigated many times, the authorities have until now deferred handing down a judgement. He said that "the government officials wanted to arrest him but they were afraid of the revolt of the villagers".[48] According to one of the provincial officials, the Ajarn has been black listed as a troublemaker, and the provincial officials are waiting for an order of arrest to be issued.[49]

In 1989, the government banned all logging concessions after the country suffered its most disastrous floods due to the deforestation crisis in the South in late 1988. In November 1989, a plan to resettle the hilltribes living in the upper watershed forest areas in the mountains in Chiang Mai to the lowlands received Cabinet approval. But how and when is

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48 Ibid.

49 This story was recounted by a provincial official who wished his name not to be mentioned, October 1988. He said to the author that "Please don't tell anybody about what I have said, and if you want to write about it in your book please don't mention my name."

not unclear. Suvit said "We will wait to see whether the government is able to keep its promise to us. If this problem has not been solved within two years, we will have to solve it by our own way".[50]

The government policy in relocating the hilltribes was seen by many as impractical and inhumane. Numerous seminars were organized to discuss this issue in both Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Ajarn Pongsak was invited to speak at these seminars. His ideas on the application of Buddhist principles to conservation and community development began to spread to the public through newspapers, magazines, and phamplets to both Thai and English-speaking audiences. The Mae Soy story, and information on the formation and activities of the strongest local conservation group were also reported.

Recognition

By 1989, all eight sub-districts of Chomthong had joined the Conservation Group raising the number to over 97,000 people. Its name was changed to the Association of Conservation and Protection of the Watershed Forest of Chomthong District. It is the largest local forest preservation movement in the North. Soon after its name was changed, the Association announced its intention to protect the forest of the Inthanon range (500 sq.kms). During the holiday period, local schools brought their classes into the forest of Mae Soy for weekend camping to stimulate an interest in nature. Student and lecturer groups of Buddhist clubs from sixteen Universities all over Thailand were attending meditation retreats and discourses on Buddhism and Conservation at Tam Tu-Phu. Significantly, the Sangha's role in conservation was becoming increasingly important. Monks from the Maha-Chulalongkorn University, a Buddhist University in Bangkok, arrived for a four-day seminar on the Monks' Role in Forest Conservation. They discussed the importance of forest preservation and the use of Buddhist ethics as a force to achieve this.

Recently, 70 forest monks, already engaged in conservation work, joined together at Tam Tu-Phu to form a Monks' Association for the Conservation of Life and Development

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50 Interview with Mr. Suvit Namthep at Wat Mae Soy, October 1989.

(Khum Phra Anuruk Pur Cheevit Lae Karn-Patana). Ajarn Pongsak was elected as the head of the group. It was an association dedicated to achieving conservation side by side with development, based on the principle of Buddhism. The discussion focused on the achievement of a balance between the maintenance of nature and the development needs of man. They also called on Buddhist monks from all over the country to join forest conservation efforts and pointed out that some funds from the temple construction fund could be set up aside for forest conservation work in their communities. "It is time that sasana (religion or Buddhism) played a part to solve the environmental crisis" said the Ajarn.[51] In 1990, the Department of Religious Affairs submitted a proposal to the Sangha Council that the two government departments (the Royal Forestry Department and the Department of Religious Affairs) work together for the protection of the forests of Thailand.

The Mae Soy project has become well-known as a demonstration project, reflecting the potential of villagers in effective forest protection and the force of religious teachings in igniting their conservation awareness. The most visible success of the project is to carry out of land reform and the emergence of new villages, born out of the new hopes generated by the ideas of co-operation within the tripartite alliance of monk, government officials, and villagers. In part this alliance was the belief that environmental preservation and community development needs a larger spiritual dimension. The project has gotten attention from the government officials, academics, fellow Buddhists, and both Thai and foreigns conservationists. An active Thai conservationist, M.R Smansnid Svasti said "Ajarn Pongsak is a man who believes in what he does and is courageous enough to face the authorities....Rousing of the villagers from their hopelessness to act on their fate is the means to social reform."[52]

A medical lecturer of Mahidol University, Pareya Tatsnapradit said "the case of Mae Soy showed that Buddhist teaching could to raise the spirit of self-reliance....The mass-conciousness of self-reliance is the root of democracy. The concept of bringing sila-dhamma

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51 Based on my observation of this meeting at Tam Tu-Phu, 1989.

52 Interview with M.R Smansnid Svasti, Chiang Mai, 1988.

(morality) back to society could be used as a means to change the society."[53] The director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education, and Culture (ICOREC), who serves as part of a team of religious advisors to Worldwild Life Fund (WWF), Mr. Martin Palmer came to Thailand to learn about Ajarn Pongsak's work in 1986. The Mae Soy story has been used in educational materials for schools in Europe and elsewhere.[54] He also shared this story with other Buddhists in Japan, Sri Lanka, and China.

Many government departments and foreign organizations have come to visit Mae Soy. To illustrate, foresters and academic groups from the Agriculture Ministry, the Forestry Department, Chulalongkorn University, the National Institute of Development and Administration (NIDA), the Third Army, foresters from Asean countries, and International Religious Conventions with delegates from Asia, Europe, and Africa have come to visit.

Once regarded as a trouble-maker and a nuisance, Ajarn Pongsak has been presented with three awards: the Good People of Society award (1988), the Good Supporter of the Royal Forestry Department award (1989), and the Global 500 Roll of Honour award (1990). He is the first Buddhist monk in Thailand to be named for the United Nation Environmental Programme's Global 500 Roll of Honour Award.[55] Although things have changed in his favour, that does not mean the end of his mission to bring morality back to society.

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53 Interview with Dr. Pareya Tatsnapradit, Chiang Mai, 1988.

54 The Nation/Thailand's English-language newspaper, December 28, 1986.

55 The Nation/ Thailand's English-language newspaper, June 5, 1990.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-) was a product of his age. He refered to his time as the decline of Buddhism. His search for spiritual meaning and his reinterpretation of Buddhism could not have occurred isolated from socio-cultural environment of his time. However, his religious thought could have developed beyond the fabric of traditional Thai Buddhist teachings and practices. The motivation for his interpretation of Theravada doctrine seems to go far beyond the simple problem of communication. It is rather a problem of making Buddhism not only meaningful but also relevant to the modern world. At the same time Buddhadasa also sees his work as an attempt to return to pristine Buddhist teaching. Buddhadasa's teaching has spread for over 50 years and has became one of the most prominent religious movements in contemporary Thailand.

The Buddhadasa movement originated in 1932, the year in which Buddhadasa, an ordinary Thai monk of Chinese origin, left his traditional Pali studies in Bangkok and returned to his hometown of Chaiya, where he spent many years alone in the forest practicing meditation and studying the Tipitaka. After he returned to a normal monastic life, he became strongly committed to the interpretation and propagation of Buddhism. The way he has led his life reflects the merging of spiritual experience and everyday living, non withdrawal from society. His forest dwelling became known as Suan Mokkh (Garden of Liberation).

Suan Mokkh, the forest hermitage, where Buddhadasa and about 70 monks reside, illustrates not only Buddhadasa's ideals of propagating the pristine substance of Buddhism in a form which combines the traditional and the modern but also reflects Buddhadasa's attempt to revive the popularity of the forest monk tradition in Thailand. Unlike most Thai monasteries, Suan Mokkh has no elaborately decorated temple. The monks live in small, relatively isolated dwellings spread throughout a wooded hillside of over 150 acres, and lead their lives simply and close to nature. Their chapel (bot) is on the top of a hill with trees as pillars and a canopy of leafy branches as a roof. The focus of the hermitage, however, is a modern building which is called "spiritual theater." It is used as an audio-visual center where Buddhism is propagated through paintings, slides, and films. Unlike the average Thai monk who does not engage in physical labor beyond the maintenace of his own quarters, the monks of Suan Mokkh spend

part of everyday working: constructing new buildings, roads, and producing the teaching material.

Buddhadasa's movement began with a core of four or five local people in Chaiya who gathered to discuss Buddhist teaching, religious problems, and the revival of Buddhism. They adopted Buddhadasa's teaching and set up a group to spread it among inhabitants. The spread of Buddhadasa's teaching has several phases. In the first decade it was a teaching for local people, namely farmers, fishers, and traditional craftsmen. It was through a Buddhist journal, Buddhasasana (founded in 1933), which was issued by Buddhadasa's younger brother, Buddhadasa's religious ideas inspired a small group of intellectuals -both monks and laymen- in the capital. Subsequently, a group of Supreme Court officials and a high-ranking senior monk of Thammayutnikai visited him at Suan Mokkh. In 1940, Buddhadasa was first invited to give a sermon in Bangkok. His challenging lecture resulted in Buddhadasa being the first monk in this country to be accepted by both the democratic and socialist sections of the Thai intelligentsia. Since then Buddhadasa's movement has expanded among the urban well-educated middle strata, particularly in Bangkok where the process of modernization was advancing, and his ideas, disseminated through his many writings, provided the basis for an urban religious movement. It won the support from a large number of upper and middle segments of the urban middle strata. In this sense, the development of Buddhadasa's movement is connected with the process of urbanization.[1]

Through over a half century, therefore Buddhadasa's movement has undergone several striking changes in the course of its development. The most recent and paradoxical is its return to rural Thailand. This can be described as a new phase of social involvement characterized by the reinterpretation by his followers to meet the needs of the masses. Since the 1980s Buddhadasa's movement has began to permeate into rural areas.

We began this study by asking some simple but sweeping questions: (1) Why and

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1 For more details about the process of urbanization in Thailand see Korff, Rüdiger, *Bangkok: Urban System and Everyday Life*. (Saarbrücken: Fort Lauderdale, 1986). O'Connor, Richard A., *Urbanism and Religion: Community, Hierarchy and Sanctity in Urban Thai Buddhist Temples* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis Cornell University, 1978).

under what conditions did Buddhadasa's movement come about? (2) What type of movement is it? (3) What is the religious "essence" of the movement? (4) What is the nature of the movement? (5) Who are followers of Buddhadasa's movement? (6) Why do people join the movement? and Why does it appear to be most meaningful to the intellectuals? (7) What is the social impact of the movement? In this concluding chapter an attempt will be made to provide answers to the questions posed. These appear to be important questions that social scientists ask about any religious movement, and therefore no attempt has been made to provide answers to all possible questions on the Buddhadasa movement.

(1) **Under what conditions did Buddhadasa's movement come about?**

Social conditions and the origins of the movement Earhart's analysis of the formative aspects of religious movements in Japan suggests that there are three interrelated factors which combine to produce an atmosphere in which religious movements can be born and nourished: (1) the fossilization of the early religious traditions, (2) severe socio-economic hardships which help to provoke "social crisis", and (3) the personal innovation of religious leaders.

Buddhadasa's movement appears to support Earhart's thesis. However, I argue that "social crisis" must be interpreted differently in Thailand than in Japan. Instead of severe socio-economic hardship it seems to be rapid social change and the confusion about cultural identity which is responsible for the crisis. Moreover, I found that the degree to which society was differentiated or secularlization also played an important role as a social factor in the rise of Buddhadasa's movement. In addition, Buddhadasa as the leader of the movement is not some kind of semidivine founder or charismatic leader mostly found in religious movements in Japan. He is rather a "Guru" or "Master" who rediscovered a vital religious element from the previous tradition and wants to transmit his comprehension to others.

The Buddhadasa movement emerged in a period after King Chulalongkorn's reform of the country in the early part of the twentieth century. During this period (1910s to 1930s), there was high tension between modern and traditional values. The triumph of democratic

ideas parallels with the widespread of nationalism, the expansion of mass education and the bureaucratic state, a growing body of middle class, and various political conflicts and economic crisis caused rapid social change (see Chapter 2). There was considerable confusion about the sudden change of the position of the monarchy as a symbol of national unity in 1932.

Changes also occurred in the religious sector. Educational and social functions of traditional Buddhism were replaced by other social institutions. The Sangha lost their intellectual leadership to the modern sector of Thai society. Traditional Buddhism moved from the public domain to the private sphere of life, particularly in Bangkok. The weakening of traditional religion from within, especially the conservative religious views of the Sangha, the strong centralization of its administration, and the maintaining of the traditional monastic educational system, resulted in its inability to speak to contemporary concerns. Established Buddhism had became fossilized. The time was ripe for some form of renewal from outside of the existing organized religious structure.

The search for stability and new identity, and even the demand for religious reinterpretation, were expressed. Yet at the same time people initially experienced this liberal political atmosphere and found opportunities to awaken a sense of individual self-awareness (see Chapter 2 and Landon: 1968, Chapter 6). Buddhadasa's reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrine contains new images and meanings of the existential dimension of human life in contemporary society. The movement can be seen as part of this process of socio-cultural change as well as a part of the "response" to the current crisis of religio-cultural identity, rather than simply as a "product" of social crisis within Thai society.

(2) **What type of movement is it?**

Bellah's investigation of the problem of tradition and change in terms of the relationship between religion and modernization in Asia suggests varieties of the cultural response to modernization. The most viable one is reformism which is defined as a movement that reinterprets a particular religious tradition to show not only that it is compatible with

modernization but also that the tradition vigorously demands at least important aspects of modernity (see Chapter 1). This form of response is most significant because it provides the potential impetus to modernization.

Bellah characterizes reformism by the following traits: a return to the early teaching and text, a rejection of most of the intervening tradition, and an interpretation of the pristine teaching as advocating social reform and national regeneration. Reformism is basically a reinterpretation of the religious symbol system in the light of a new existential situation.

Central to the Buddhadasa movement is Buddhadasa's reinterpretation of the Pali Canon, the heart of Theravada doctrine. It is thus possible to separate what he considers "true" Buddhism from popular beliefs in order to provide an innovation that modernity implies. He teaches that original Buddhism is essentially in accord with modern science. This stance allows him to reject many aspects of traditional Buddhist teaching and practice, including all commentaries and subcommentaries. In this respect Buddhadasa's interpretation represents an aspect of "demythologization" in the Weberian sense. He also requires to return to the substantive "essence" of the tradition through interpretating Theravada doctrine and transformation of its form.

Buddhadasa also arrives at a more holistic interpretation of Buddhism from the perspective of everyday life which provides new meaning and identity to the ordinary people. Buddhism is interpreted as a way of life rather than a "teaching." The ultimate goal of Buddhism is not something inaccessible, but a goal to be realized in this life. The direction is aimed more towards the laity than monks. It follows the shift of ideas and values of people rather than offers standards of doctrine or moral purity. Important enough, his use of ordinary words to explain the high-level of Buddhist teaching partly reflects his aim to teach the general public.

On these grounds Buddhadasa offers a particular response of Thai Buddhism to modernity. He illustrates Bellah's notion of religion standing in "creative tension" within its culture and society. Buddhadasa's movement fits well into Bellah's category of reformism. It

is a reformist movement.

(3) **What is the religious "essence" of the Buddhadasa movement ?**

"Rationalization" is the term used by Weber to identify a characteristic of certain religious doctrines, particularly Calvinism.[2] In The Sociology of Religion, Weber describes a prophet or religious innovation as the agent of the process of breakthrough to a higher, in the sense of more rationalized and systematized, cultural order which in turn has implications for the society in which it becomes institutionalized. He points out the conditions which produced religious rationalization, people who carried it out, and the direction it took.[3] To rationalize is to reorder one's religious belief in a new and more coherent way to be more in line with what one knows and experiences in this life.[4]

The characteristic of Buddhadasa's teaching represents such a reordering (see Buddhadasa's interpretation of Work, Nibbana, and Kamma in Chapter 4). It is necessary to add that there are other aspects of Buddhadasa's teaching which can be adequately grasped by viewing them in the light of what Weber described "early Buddhism", and equally important in their direct and indirect influence on shaping the attitudes and inspirations of his followers. That is, a form of teaching consistent with the ideals of nibbana (a doctrine of detachment), devaluation of ceremonialism and use of the ordinary language suited the culture of its urban clients; the movement has a loosely organized structure and find itself at home among urban "bourgeois" benefactors.[5] In these sense, as Tambiah has observed, modern Buddhism appears as a reincarnation of Weber's ancient Buddhism.[6]

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2 Rationality, according to Weber, meant a systematization of means or norm in relation to an end or goal. In his study of the Protestant ethic, he pointed out a relatively high degree of rationality in the teaching of the Protestant reformers. Such ethic systems erode the mysteriousness of religion itself, see Weber, Max, *The Sociology of Religion*. trans. by Ephraim Fischoff. (Boston: Beacon 1963), p.489

3 Parsons's discussion in his introduction to Weber in *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), pp. XXXII-XXXIII.

4 Ibid.

5 Tambiah, S.J. "Buddhism and This-worldly Activity" *Modern Asian Studies*, VII, 1973, pp. 4-6.

6 Ibid., p. 8.

(4) **What is the nature of the Buddhadasa movement?**

Buddhadasa's movement generated and developed within the Thai Sangha. Though it strongly criticized traditional Buddhism, it has never rejected the authority of the Sangha. The movement also shows little interest in bringing about structural change within the Sangha, neither in building up an effective organization nor a special system for itself. The dominant feature of the movement lies in Buddhadasa's interpretation of the Pali Canon; and emphasizes attaining the heart of Buddhism rather than rely on the different appearence and details of monastic discipline and practice. Our interviews suggest that the expansion of Buddhadasa's movement derives from Buddhadasa's teachings. There is perhaps no Buddhist monk in the history of Thai Buddhism whose teachings have been published as widely as Buddhadasa. All of his sermons and lectures were tape-recorded and published by his followers. The great volume of Buddhadasa's published teachings is significant. It reflects partly that his followers wanted to know his ideas and futher to propagate them, and partly the increasing demand of urban middle strata.

The characteristic of Buddhadasa's teaching is perhaps best expressed by describing it as a theological view of man's nature or a system of sila tham (morality) and a social order. Moreover, it is important to note that although we aspire to relate Buddhadasa's interpretative ideas to the social situations which give them birth, the ideas have a life of their own life. That is, for a half century of change and development Buddhadasa's teachings are much less likely to be modified by changing social circumstances. And this enables the teachings to be considered as an independent variable, modifying the behavior of individuals in new social situation.

Another striking characteristic of Buddhadasa's movement is its organization. As I have already discussed, standards of doctrine and attempts to enforce moral purity have largely been devalued by Buddhadasa (see Chapter 5). All followers have to be responsible for themselves. This trend seems likely to continue, with an increasingly fluid type of organization in which many special purpose sub-groups form and disband. The movement has

proved to be a relatively loosely knit association, so informal in its organization that many of its followers were led to believe that it has no "organization" and that it did not exist as a "separate" group. This was felt to be true because no census of followers was taken, and there are no institutional devices for recruiting followers. There are neither criteria nor a set of tests for distinguishing those who are accepted for membership from those who are not; no committees and official duties of any kind; no law and rules within the movement; no regular pledges of financial support were organized. No efforts were made to formulate a common, explicit creed of beliefs and practices. It is impossible to estimate the number of people who, while living in their own homes and employed in "outside" jobs devoted almost all of their spare time to promoting Buddhadasa's teaching by their own methods in their own localities.

Though the movement has no formal members, it has a character of initimacy and devotion. Followers identify themselves as members of the movement based on their personal religious understanding and not based on a formal membership in the movement. Significantly, laymen who adopted Buddhadasa's teaching become propagators and spread it in various "forms" according to their own abilities and concepts without being subject to anybody's assignment. Some followers have organized themselves to spread the teaching through activities such as the establishment of forest monastic centers, public libraries, press houses, publication of Buddhadasa's teaching, to face to face talks. Buddhadasa's movement spreads unofficially, through various possible forms of relationships. The activities of these scattered groups and individuals were carried on almost entirely by volunteers and at their own expense. Suan Mokkh does not function as an administrative headquarter with branche offices but as the centre of ideology (see Chapter 5). Buddhadasa plays the role of being inspirator rather than charismatic or authoritarian leader.

It seems likely that the simple organizational structure of the movement is not an accident or because of its inability to set up an effective modern organization. Buddhadasa's movement appeared at the beginning with rather common structure, and although it underwent several changes in the course of its development, the basic pattern of the movement remained substantially the same. This stem partly from the characteristic of Buddhadasa's teaching which allows the flexibility to emerge, and partly it is an intention of

Buddhadasa himself. Volunteering and sharing, for him, are not only a way of growth, but a way of discipline or even an instrument of social control. To some extent the loosely organized movement is essentially tolerant toward other religious groups. In this sense Buddhadasa advocates interdependency within the social order.

Rather than interpreting the characteristic of Buddhadasa's movement as a loosely organized movement I see in it the increasing acceptance of the notion, which is always emphasized by Buddhadasa, that each individual must work out his own ultimate solutions. The answer to religious questions and life can validly be sought in various spheres of secular art and thought (see Chapter 5). At the same time it also reflects the emphasis of the movement on the development of personality which is viewed by Buddhadasa as endlessly revisable. In other words the search for adequate standards of action which is the same time a search for personal maturity and social relevance.

(5) **Who are followers of the Buddhadasa movement ?**

In The Sociology of Religion, Weber points out the great fecundity of the "middle class" in religious innovations which in turn has implications for the society in which it becomes institutionalized.[7] Two main characteristics of such "middle class" or "urban citizenry", according to Weber are: (1) the communal feeling of an urban citizenry which is necessary for middle class intellectualism, and (2) emancipation from magic which is a precondition for middle class intellectualism.[8]

Our sample population of Buddhadasa's followers suggests that they are found in all regions of the country, and from a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds. However, the largest group is well-educated, urban, drawn from upper-middle to middle strata of Thai society (see Chapter6). They are of urban origin. They require their religion not only to be "right" and "true" but beneficial in this world. They have some resemblance to the Weberian type of middle class.

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7 Weber: 1963, pp. 93-98.

8 Ibid., p. 127.

Although this group contains large numbers of government officials and professionals (see Chapter 6). It is not an independent unofficial intelligentsia as Weber's postulates. They assemble their forces under the symbol of class unity which results in its restricted intensive influence to society as a whole. Nevertheless I argue that in Thailand, particularly after 1932, well-educated, urban upper and middle strata has played a leading role as an agent of change within the Thai context (see Chapter 2). From our interviews we found that this urban middle strata is the source of greatest support for propagating and publishing of Buddhadasa's teaching, including various development programs launched by Buddhadasa's monk-followers in rural areas. It can be said that the expansion of the movement throughout the country lies in the hands of this group.

(6) **Why do people join the movement**?

The central feature of Buddhadasa's movement focuses on Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism. The attention at the beginning of the movement and throughout 50 years was and still is the promotion of Buddhadasa's teaching. Why do people accept Buddhadasa's teaching?

Our interviews suggest that interest in the movement is often sparked by Buddhadasa's books. Individuals read them for one reason and are inspired and influenced by other aspects of the teaching. In this sense Buddhadasa's teaching can be seen as directed toward literate people who pursue their interest in Buddhism by reading books. To a considerable degree, individuals join the movement on the basis of their understanding of the teachings and because they feel they have been enlightened. The importance of religious rationalization and this worldly activity are considerable.

"Buddhadasa's books changed my life" or "I found a new quality of life" or "no conflict with others and no fear for future" or "Buddhadasa's teaching give me hope for the future of our country" were the phrases I most heard from my respondents both monks and laymen. However, change and changed life seems to be not required by the movement, but

for those who changed, once they understood the "meaning" of life through Buddhadasa's teaching, problems of every sort were perceived to melt away and disappear, and free themselves from the tight determinism of social conditions. They found a new relation to others. The relation of man to the condition of his existence has been conceived as more open and more subject to change and development. They adopted new means to attain this-worldly ends, and change their conduct because these means come to be values as ends (see Chapter 6). In this way Buddhadasa's teaching is creative.

The fundamental characteristic of Buddhadasa's teaching lies in an attempt to illustrate the broader spheres of life relevant to everyday experience or the law of one's own existence rather than the standards of doctrine or moral purity. By denying a fatalistic attitude and stressing this-worldly activism and individualistic responsibility offer opportunities for creative development and exploration in every sphere of human action. Modern man can accept Buddhism and "modern" values simultaneously. This is a part of an answer to the question of why Buddhadasa's movement is popular among Thai intellectuals.

However, it should be noted that their attitudes toward social problems tended towards oversimplification and incompleteness from the point of view of the social scientist. They are largly seen in term of individual rather than as institutional breakdowns, social conflicts or cultural lags. Poverty, corruption, unemployment are considered in a framework of personal moral terms and concepts of ethical conduct. Their belief was that with individual change would come direct solutions of the social problems, whatever they might be. These attitudes did not differ from those of general Thai Buddhists.

Some respondents directly expressed their problems in sense of normative and moral ambiguity. To a considerable degree Buddhadasa's teaching responds to problems of personal adjustment and offers a sense of security and direction for individuals by providing a foundation of self-definition in the confusion of rapid social change. Moreover, the attractiveness of the movement is much enhanced when the degree of social change increases. And after the 1970s, a period marked by greatly accelerated socio-political changs and moral crisis, the movement rapidly expanded. Numerous people were also attracted to numerous

new religious movements and various kinds of healing mediums and superstitions (see Chapter 2). Furthermore we found that political circumstance has played an important role in the expansion of religious movements. In the case of Buddhadasa's movement, a number of followers involve themselves in social issues, particularly in rural areas (see Chapter 7).

(7) **What is the social impact of the movement?**

Buddhadasa's movement began with a primarilly religious interest. It has not only had an impact on individuals but also on society at large in so far as it has encouraged individuals to become more active in social involvement. From our study we found that while Buddhadasa's movement has attracted a large number of urban well-educated middle strata of Thai society, there are some evidences indicating that a change is occurring at the level of mass religiosity particularly since 1980s when communist insurgency and political tempo were calm (see Chapter 2, 7). That is, Buddhadasa's teaching has spread among people in the rural areas where his followers, in particular monks have taken part in a wide range of social activities. They have moved beyond Buddhadasa by simplifying or reinterpreting his teaching in order to meet the needs of rural people. They play an important role as "cultural brokers" or "middle men" to bridge Buddhadasa's teaching and the masses through various community development programs and social welfare in rural areas. At the same time, they preached Buddhist teaching, emphasizing this-worldly activities to people. These programs were developed over the years. It could be said that without such monk-followers Buddhadasa's teaching can be only a teaching for the literate. For them, religious action is no more than in the temple, it is conceived to be identical with social activities. The involvement of social issues give credibility to their claim of being spokesman for the masses. They have justified their social activism on the grounds of both their historical function and sociological inevitability. Obviously, the form of social involvement has changed from what it was century ago. And their new roles have some considerable differences from the conservative traditional role of the monk in the traditional villages and communities today.

During the past thirty years, national socio-economic development policies of the Thai government have brought about rapid socio-cultural changes and economic growth,

increasing urbanization and industrialization. At the same time they have led to the increasing differential between rural poor and more affluent urban classes, rural economic bankruptcy, ecological distruction, dissolution of family bonds and community life that poses the major problems for the development of the country. In short, the past three decades have created a crisis in rural communities.

Buddhadasa's movement represents a contemporary attempt to respond to the problem of rural communities of Thai society. It has generated a number of groups to perform communal functions for individuals as well as integrative functions for society. The case of Phra Pongsak's activities in Mae Soy illustrates the community involvement among Buddhadasa's followers (see Chapter 7). Phra Pongsak came to Mae Soy in the 1980s to set up a meditation center to introduce new perspectives of Buddhist teaching and practice to Mae Soy's inhabitants. He recognized that the villagers faced serious problems of poverty which were directly linked to drastic deforestation. He sought to raise villagers' conciousness by the link between Buddhadasa's teaching based on self-reliance and the sense of gratitude to nature to the problem of villagers's poverty and deforestation. Once the villagers came to realize that their destiny lay in their own hands, the largest local forest preservation movement in the north emerged. The new found sense of community spirit and dissatisfaction with government environmental policies, particularly with respect to logging concessions and deforestation led them to confront not only local authorities and capitalist influential groups but also the central government. Their campaigns were successful in many areas. Certainly, they have coped with many problems both from conventional senior monks and government officials, including political pressures.

The monk's leadership of the conservation campaign to protect the forest, and the villagers' confrontations with the government officials have social and political consequences. The success of the local conservation movement, which is a serious issue not only for villagers but also for society as a whole, implies not only social involvement but also political activism.

Villagers cooperating in community development, which parallels environmental

preservation in order to improve the quality of life, both in its physical and spiritual sense, reveals a kind of social reform. Though many villagers at Mae Soy still believe in the next life, kamma, and merit making in traditional view (see Chapter 4, 7). The magical world view certainly persists in their minds. They do not know Suan Mokkh even the name Buddhadasa. But to a considerable degree the notion of self-revising, self-reliance, and cooperation have developed elaborate rationalization to bring their faith in the new experience validity into some kind of harmony with the modern world. Meditation is no more considered only for monks but also for them. Many villagers have given up all addicts, gambling, able to pay their debt, and can gradually solve their economic problem. No doubt, it is not easy but it is a real challenge for them. These are the result of long years of Phra Pongsak's effort. In these respect Buddhadasa's movement can continue the ideals of Buddhism and at the same time speak to the needs of society.

It is important to note that there are some different characters between two groups of Buddhadasa's followers: urban well-educated middle strata and rural group. For the former, their religious concerns are more personal and individual-centered; less organized structure; more relevance to written texts and dissemination of written material. While the latter are more community-oriented; more concerned with social and ecological issues; more collective action under inspiration of monk who is the transmitter and reinterpretator of Buddhadasa's ideas.

The last concern of this concluding chapter opens to a final look at Buddhadasa's movement from the standpoint of its possible growth and success in future. To begin with, it should be noted that through over fifty years of change and development (1932-) Buddhadadasa's movement has occupied an important place in Thai religious history. Up to the present day (1991), the movement is still active and has increasingly attracted the young generation. As far as our study is concerned there is no evidence to indicate that there has been serious dissent within the movement which might result in its future decline. This is partly because its "organization" is based on a flexible, multi-centered mode of dissemination based on voluntary groups and individuals.

One of the most important questions is what will happen to the movement after Buddhadasa passes away? Our interviews suggest that the expansion of Buddhadasa's movement seems not to center or depend on the leader. Its followers do not demand to see the leader. Until now (Buddhadasa is 87 years old) is relatively unknown, and he has appointed no successor. Buddhadasa's movement can remain a movement without a leader so long as his writings remain relevant (see Chapter 5).

There are many obstacles to the future growth of the movement, such as a number of completly traditionalist movements, the flourishing of popular beliefs, political instability, and the ambivalent institutions of government. It is also true that the Thai elite is motivated mainly by secular ideologies. However, the position of Buddhadasa's movement is not anti-modern.

There are signs that the movement continues to attract followers. The increasing proportion of educated Thai, and the expanding urban middle class can ensure the future growth of the movement. Further, the movement has developed a community development program based on Buddhist ethics which has proved to be feasible. The relatively successful social engagement of the movement in rural areas, particularly in addressing urgent current problems, allows it not only to spread among rural people but also provides a way of rousing the masses as well as awakening the Sangha as a whole. New directions in the development of the movement will be closely linked to its social activities both in towns and in rural areas.

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An die Leitung
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Mit freundlichem Gruss

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